



CENTER FOR  
**BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW**

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR  
**HUMAN  
SEXUALITY**

by David Closson



## CENTER FOR BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

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We believe that Jesus Christ created all things and rules all things and that He Himself is truth. We believe the Bible is God's inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Word and that submitting our lives to it should be the goal of everyone who seeks to follow Christ. Furthermore, we believe that the Bible offers the most rational and satisfying answers to life's most fundamental questions, including:

- Why are we here?
- What has gone wrong with our world?
- Is there any hope?
- How does it all end?

We believe a person exhibits a biblical worldview when their beliefs and actions are aligned with the Bible, acknowledging its truth and applicability to every area of life.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR HUMAN SEXUALITY:  
SURVEY OF CULTURE, SCRIPTURE, AND CHURCH HISTORY  
BY DAVID CLOSSON

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# BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR HUMAN SEXUALITY:

SURVEY OF CULTURE, SCRIPTURE,  
AND CHURCH HISTORY

by David Closson

The rapidly changing moral landscape of the twenty-first century presents a daunting challenge for Christians committed to biblical sexual ethics. In a relatively short amount of time, the moral framework undergirding Western culture has been upended, and a revolution in morality has overturned centuries of norms concerning the family, marriage, and human sexuality.

The comprehensive scope of this moral revolution is unprecedented. The rise of secularism and the waning influence of Christianity in Western societies has transformed the way people make moral judgments. A 2021 survey revealed that only six percent of Americans now hold a biblical worldview.<sup>1</sup> As a result, most people do not understand basic Christian convictions, particularly convictions about marriage and human sexuality. Instead, they regard the Bible's teachings about men and women, the exclusivity and permanence of marriage, and God's design and purpose for sex as outdated and oppressive.

**THE IDEAS OF THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION ARE NOW  
ACCEPTED, CELEBRATED, AND EVEN PROMOTED IN  
ALMOST EVERY SPHERE OF SOCIETY.**



Beyond mere ignorance, the hostility against Christian sexual ethics is rising and palpable. The Bible's teachings on marriage and the sexes are challenged daily. Although same-sex marriage was not officially sanctioned by any nation until 2001,<sup>2</sup> the ideas of the sexual revolution are now accepted, celebrated, and even promoted in the spheres of media, politics, business, entertainment, and law. Moreover, the Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) means our laws' definitions of biological sex are changing, too.<sup>3</sup> As public opinion on LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) issues has shifted, society is telling Christians to either abandon their convictions or leave the public square. Christians who refuse to surrender their beliefs often face public denunciations, censure and hostility, lawsuits, exorbitant monetary fines, loss of jobs, physical assault, and even prison.<sup>4</sup>

But secular culture is not the only challenger of Christian sexual ethics. Increasingly, theologically liberal churches and denominations are raising objections to the church's historic teaching on marriage. These denominations insist that the Bible allows for a wide range of interpretations. As a result, Christians—and especially pastors—face mounting pressure to compromise or at least downplay the Bible's teaching on human sexuality.

The moral revolution has raised questions and challenged long-standing presuppositions about sexuality. How should

Christians who are committed to God’s Word and a biblical sexual ethic respond? What responsibility do pastors and those called to shepherd the church have when it comes to these contested issues? What does the Bible teach about marriage and homosexuality? How can Christians practice a biblical ethic that is marked by both truth and love? This publication will help today’s Christians answer these questions by surveying key passages of Scripture that speak directly to human sexuality, as well as consulting the wisdom of pastors and theologians throughout church history.

For many people, conversations about marriage and sexuality are not primarily theoretical or academic, but personal. They or someone they know have wrestled with questions about human sexuality. Unfortunately, the church has sometimes failed to minister in a spirit of love and grace to those personally affected by the sexual brokenness that marks our fallen world. This publication seeks to present the Bible’s teaching on marriage and sexuality with clarity and compassion, with the understanding that both truth and love must frame a biblically faithful response to the moral revolution.

But first, it is vital to place the moral revolution in its context, define key terms such as “sexuality,” and explain why a biblical perspective on these issues is so crucial for Christians who desire to honor God and love their neighbors well.

## **SETTING THE STAGE: TIMELINE OF THE MORAL REVOLUTION**

Modern society often criticizes conservative Christians’ alleged obsession with sexual ethics. However, secular and progressive elites are increasingly the ones forcing the issue, insisting conservatives embrace their worldview and the full spectrum of LGBT policy positions or face social ostracizing, public shaming, or worse. Moreover, the Overton window (*i.e.*, the range of policies that are politically acceptable to the majority of

people at a given time) has shifted on the public's perception of homosexuality. Because of this shift, those in positions of cultural and political influence are much more willing to use the coercive power of government to accomplish their political objectives.

Such is the challenge Christians must now navigate; the zero-sum approach of ideologues and activists means religious conservatives face increasing social, political, and legal pressure to succumb to the new orthodoxy.

The “sexual revolution” of the 1960s did not emerge in a vacuum. It resulted from our culture's shifting views of right and wrong—a moral revolution. Thus, before addressing today's pressing issues related to sexuality, it is helpful to take a step back and consider how we arrived at where we are today. What key cultural changes created the necessary conditions for the moral revolution and new sexual ethics to take hold?

**AT LEAST FOUR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS PAVED THE WAY FOR THE MORAL REVOLUTION: URBANIZATION, CONTRACEPTION, THE OVERTURNING OF LAWS RESTRICTING SEXUAL BEHAVIOR, AND CHRISTIANITY'S LOSS OF CULTURAL INFLUENCE.**

A lengthy overview of the history of the moral revolution exceeds the scope of this publication. However, it is important to note a few of the developments that helped make the twentieth century, in the words of one commentator, “the century of the greatest change in sexual morality in the history of Western civilization.”<sup>5</sup> This historical framework will help us navigate the moral confusion surrounding much of the conversation about sexual ethics.

There are at least four cultural developments that paved the way for the moral revolution.<sup>6</sup> First, the rise of urbanization offered new opportunities for anonymity. In 1800, seven percent of the world's population lived in cities. Today, 55 percent of the world's population lives in dense population centers. By 2050, it is projected that this number will rise to 68 percent.<sup>7</sup> One of the social effects of the rise of dense population centers is the erosion of community-based accountability that often exists in rural and less populated areas. In other words, the rise of cities helped remove a societal check against premarital and extramarital liaisons by lowering the chance of discovery and exposure.

Second, advances in contraceptive technology—such as “the Pill”—separated sex from potential pregnancy in the minds of many people. As Albert Mohler notes, “Once the Pill arrived, with all its promises of reproductive control, the biological check on sexual immorality that had shaped human existence from Adam and Eve forward was removed almost instantaneously.”<sup>8</sup> Whereas before the potential consequence of conceiving a child served as a natural deterrent from premarital or extramarital sex, the Pill allowed for seemingly consequence-free sexual activity.

Third, laws that restricted certain sexual behaviors and conduct were replaced or overturned. For example, access to birth control expanded dramatically following two Supreme Court cases, *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) and *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972). In *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the Court overturned a state law that prevented married women from accessing birth control. In *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, the Court extended contraceptive access to unmarried couples. Today, legal precedent has established a broad view of



individual liberty regarding personal and intimate decisions. Recent evidence for this includes the Supreme Court’s decision in 2015 to legalize same-sex marriage. Significantly, the majority in this case based their decision on a very expansive view of liberty, arguing the Constitution promises liberty to the extent that people may “define and express their identity.”<sup>9</sup> The culture and mainstream legal philosophy have propagated a new autonomous being who alone may shape their identity and sexual behavior.



Finally, a fourth development contributing to the moral revolution is Christianity’s loss of cultural influence. According to Pew Research, in 2019, 65 percent of American adults described themselves as Christian—down 12 percentage points since 2009. In the same time period, the percentage of Americans who identify with no religion has risen to 26 percent, up from 17 percent in 2009. The rise in religious “nones” is most pronounced among the younger generations.<sup>10</sup> These changes in America’s religious demographics mean that fewer people understand or hold Christian convictions, including those relating to sexual morality.

These four factors have contributed to a cultural, political, and legal environment hostile to Christian beliefs on the nature of marriage and human sexuality. Additional trends—such as cohabitation, absentee fathers, no-fault divorce, pornography, and abortion—have also contributed to the weakening of the family and society’s moral malaise.

Christian ethics are clearly no longer a cultural default—they are in need of a robust defense. The church has an opportunity and a responsibility to articulate the substance behind its convictions. If the church does not teach a biblical sexual ethic, the culture and its antibiblical ideas and practices will irreversibly undermine natural marriage and family, which constitute the foundation of civilization. The following will provide an explanation for a biblical sexual ethic, beginning with an introduction to the concepts of sexuality and marriage from the perspective of Scripture.

## **DEFINITION AND GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE**

The term “sexuality” is frequently used without a clear definition.<sup>11</sup> The prevalence of several competing interpretations reflects a lack of consensus, even within the church. For example, one theologian states that sexuality is the “universal human condition of being desirous for, expressive of, and receptive toward human relationships.”<sup>12</sup> Another argues it is “the human drive toward intimate communion.”<sup>13</sup> A third says, “sexuality comprises all aspects of the human person that are related to existence as male and female.”<sup>14</sup>

Common to these expansive definitions is the idea that sexuality is a personal and relational reality, not a physical activity. However, others expand the definition further, arguing that sexuality, as an essential part of human experience and identity, necessarily includes behavior. Many in the LGBT

movement hold to this view and thus define themselves in light of their sexual preferences or “sexual orientation,” a term that encompasses sexual attractions, behaviors, and self-identification.<sup>15</sup>

For Christians, perhaps one of the difficulties with defining sexuality is that the Bible does not give a textbook definition. As Ken Magnuson explains, “[The Bible] depicts human beings as embodied creatures who are male and female, and it speaks clearly about sexual desire and sex, but it does not explicitly treat the concept of sexuality. As a result, it may be that our understanding is strongly influenced by accounts derived from social science and even popular culture.”<sup>16</sup> Absent an easily accessible definition, some Christians may take their cues on sexuality from recent academic studies, marketing campaigns, or cultural norms.

**SEXUALITY IS THE BASIS OF THE DESIRE FOR MALE  
AND FEMALE TO BE UNITED IN A ONE-FLESH UNION  
THAT WE CALL MARRIAGE.**

While the Bible does not provide a succinct definition for sexuality, it does provide a robust framework for one. Magnuson proposes a helpful definition: “The Biblical account suggests that human sexuality is a central aspect of who we are as human beings, which produces sexual desire, drawing us towards the one-flesh union of one man and one woman in marriage.” He adds, “Sexuality is a way of describing the dynamic of maleness and femaleness, which produces a desire that moves male and female to be completed through an intimate bond that Genesis describes as a one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24).”<sup>17</sup>

In other words, sexuality is the basis of the desire for male and female to be united in a one-flesh union that we call marriage. Such a union is both physical and relational, exclusive, and permanent. God intended sexual desire to draw people to marriage, not merely to sex.<sup>18</sup> Thus, because the marriage relationship governs a biblical understanding of sexuality, understanding what the Bible teaches about the nature and purposes of marriage is essential.

## THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Below, a few key passages lay out the Bible's teaching on marriage.

### *Genesis 1-2*

A Christian theology of marriage begins in Genesis 1-2. These verses contain some of the most important statements on marriage in the Bible. The importance of the passage is underscored by how frequently Jesus and the apostle Paul quote it and use the example of the pre-fall union of Adam and Eve when discussing marriage.

After an overview of God's creation of the world, Genesis 1 concludes with the creation of the first human couple. Genesis 1:26-28 explains that God created Adam and Eve in His own image and tasked them with the responsibility to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it."<sup>19</sup> Together, the first human pair reflect God to the rest of creation in a unique way and are responsible for exercising dominion and filling the earth.

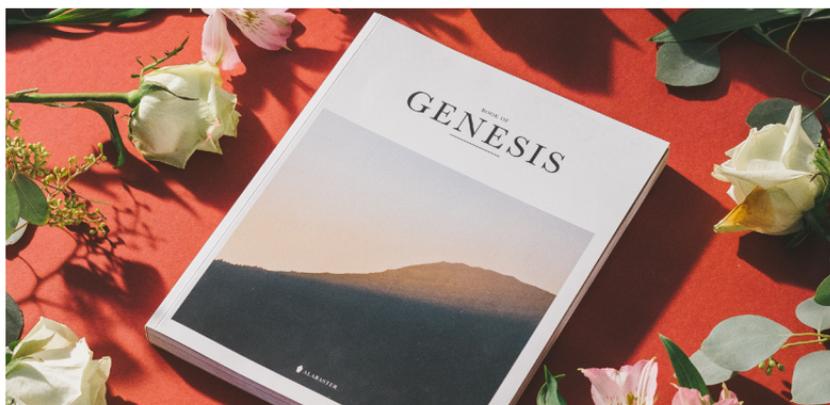
Genesis 2 develops the teaching about God's creation of male and female in His image. Although everything was declared "good" in Genesis 1, God says in Genesis 2:18 that it is not good for Adam to be alone and declares His intention to create

a helper fit for Adam. After Adam is unable to find a suitable companion in the process of naming the animals, God causes a deep sleep to fall over him and creates the first woman out of Adam himself (Gen 2:21-22). When God presents Eve to Adam, the man proclaims, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:23).

**MARRIAGE IS A PERMANENT, EXCLUSIVE, AND SACRED COVENANT CREATED BY GOD, A COVENANT THAT IS BUILT INTO THE VERY FABRIC OF CREATION THROUGH THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF THE SEXES.**

Immediately after Adam’s pronouncement, the author pauses the narrative and provides an editorial note that frames and informs all subsequent biblical reflection on marriage. Genesis 2:24-25 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 were not ashamed.” When understood in context, this passage teaches several important truths about the nature of marriage, and more broadly, sexuality.

First, marriage is permanent. A man and woman leave their families of origin and are united together in a life-long relationship. When questioned about marriage in Matthew 19, Jesus cites Genesis 2:24 and emphasizes the permanence of marriage: “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mat 19:6; cf. Mark 10:9). The very limited reasons Scripture provides for divorce also indicates the permanent nature of marriage.



Second, marriage is exclusive. The “one flesh” union between a husband and wife creates a unitive bond that joins spouses to each other in a profound way. This new union is a powerful force that needs to be safeguarded. The Song of Solomon celebrates the beauty of a protected sexual intimacy between a young bride and her husband. The two are truly fulfilled in their intimacy by a mutual vulnerability and unconditional love, expressed in their verbal adoration for one another. This intimate bond requires exclusive devotion to the marriage partner; union with another violates that bond. For this reason, Scripture treats adultery and other forms of sexual immorality very seriously (*e.g.*, 1 Cor 6:12-20). Even lustful thoughts directed toward another person is a violation of the exclusive devotion and faithfulness that belong in marriage (Mat 5:28).

Third, marriage is a sacred covenant. Whereas most contracts between adults may be entered and severed at will without severe consequence, a covenant is a permanent agreement established before God. In other words, God is personally involved in marriage, which is why it is sacred. Jesus explains this in Matthew 19 by reiterating that God joins couples in marriage. Because of the sacred nature of marriage, a man and woman should enter it reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.



Fourth, sexual differentiation is part of God's plan for marriage. God did not create androgynous beings; He created two complementary, biologically, and genetically-sexed individuals. In other words, God built the complementarity of the sexes into the very fabric of creation. The creation of male and female is not accidental or incidental but central to God's design of human beings created in His image.<sup>20</sup> In

Genesis 1, the mandate to be "fruitful and multiply" is given to both the man and the woman; neither could fulfill this charge alone. Thus, what is referred to today as the "gender binary" is rooted in the order of creation, not only in human beings but in the entire animal kingdom.

### ***1 Corinthians 6:12-20***

Another text central to the Bible's teaching on marriage and sexuality is 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. This passage helps form a Christian sexual ethic by defining the acceptable boundaries for sexual activity. Paul advances two important truths in this passage. First, sexual intercourse is proper and permitted in marriage. Second, sexual immorality is a particularly dangerous and heinous sin.

In context, Paul is responding to questions raised by Christians in Corinth who appear to have been influenced by Gnostic thinking.<sup>21</sup> Paul specifically addresses the libertarian motto, "All things are lawful to me" in verse 12. Some in Corinth believed their physical bodies did not matter and, therefore, they could eat whatever they wanted (v. 13a) and engage in sexual immorality with prostitutes (v. 13b).

In verse 13b, Paul shifts the discussion from food to the misuse of sexuality among the Corinthians. Paul's readers are gravely

mistaken if they think they can involve their bodies in sexual immorality. He writes, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (v. 13). The Lord is “for the body” in the sense that God has plans for the human body. In fact, a believer will receive a glorified body, which means embodiment will be humanity’s permanent state of being. Jesus’ resurrection prefigures the resurrection of all bodies (v. 14). Paul’s message here is clear: because God has plans for the bodies of believers, the Corinthians cannot do whatever they want with their bodies.

Paul continues his argument in verse 15, explaining to the Corinthians that not only does God have plans for their bodies, but that their bodies belong to Christ: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” (v. 15). Paul sees two possible “memberships” for the body: membership with Christ or membership with a prostitute (here representative of sin). These memberships are mutually exclusive: people can hold one or the other, but not both. When a Christian uses their body to engage in improper intercourse, they wrench their body away from its rightful membership and join it in a wrongful membership. To underscore his point, Paul appeals to Genesis 2:24: “Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh” (v. 16). From Paul’s perspective, the Corinthians fundamentally misunderstood the intimate union forged between a man and a woman during sexual intercourse. Sex is not like eating food to fill one’s stomach; the resulting one-flesh union joins the couple together in a profound way.

With the gravity of sexual sin in mind, Paul issues a command in verse 18: “flee sexual immorality.” This imperative is grounded in the fact that “every other sin a person commits outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body” (v. 18). Commenting on this verse, theologian Gregg Allison explains, “Sexual immorality is profoundly different [from other sins] because it defrauds the body of its proper membership in



Christ, and it contradicts the truth, purpose, and destiny of the body.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, for believers, the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (v. 19), and the very idea of joining God’s sanctified temple to a prostitute (*i.e.*, sin) should be unthinkable.

### *Additional Passages*

Another passage that underscores the proper bounds of sexual expression is 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. In the early church, members enjoyed close relationships with one another. Some in the Thessalonian church allowed this extended contact between Christians to become the occasion for adultery and other forms of sexual immorality. Paul warns these Christians “that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter” (v. 6). In other words, committing sexual sin with another believer’s spouse is trespassing a boundary that must not be crossed. Instead, Christians must “abstain from sexual immorality” and control their bodies in holiness and honor (v. 3-4). Paul is adamant that the close relationships church members enjoy with one another must never cross the established boundaries of sexual morality.

1 Corinthians 7:1-9 is another instructive passage for understanding God’s design for marriage and sexuality. In this passage, Paul counters the philosophy of asceticism, which praises the good of spiritual practices but denigrates the temporal or bodily realm. The Ascetics had written to Paul: “It is good for

a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (v. 1). Although Paul agrees, to a point, that it is better for people to remain unmarried given the shortness of time until the second coming, he strongly disagrees with the notion that married couples should abstain from sexual intimacy. In verses 2-3, he writes, “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.” In these verses, Paul says that it is wrong for spouses to withhold conjugal rights from each other because it could tempt them to look for sexual fulfillment in sinful ways. According to Paul, marriage is the only appropriate context for expressing and fulfilling sexual desire. In other words, sexuality does not merely draw people to sex but to the one-flesh union of marriage. Any type of sexual expression outside the boundaries of the marital relationship is wrong.

## **HUMAN MARRIAGE SHOULD REFLECT CHRIST’S MARRIAGE TO THE CHURCH THROUGH SACRIFICIAL LOVE.**

Finally, the Bible teaches that marriage illustrates and reflects the relationship between God and His people. Paul explains this in Ephesians 5:22-33 while giving instructions to Christian husbands and wives. After describing the sacrificial love Christ has for His church, Paul addresses husbands in verse 28, saying, “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” Here, Paul charges husbands to imitate Christ by sacrificially loving their wives. Then, in verses 29-30, Paul explains that human marriage is to be patterned after Christ’s marriage to the church: “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” In verse 31, Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, drawing a parallel between the “one-flesh” union of human marriage and the union of believers

to Christ. By making this connection, Paul makes it clear that God intended marriage to point beyond itself, to the relationship between Christ and the church. He states this explicitly in the next verse, writing, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (v. 32). In context, the word “mystery” refers to something that was previously hidden but is now revealed. This “profound mystery” is that from the beginning, God intended marriage to image the gospel and Christ’s redemptive love for His bride. To the degree that our marriages are what God intended them to be, they provide a picture (however imperfect) of the union between Christ and the church, which displays God to the watching world.<sup>23</sup>

## **DEPARTURES FROM GOD’S DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY**

A biblical theology of marriage understands that marriage is God’s idea and not open to revision. When followed, God’s plan for sexuality leads to human flourishing; it strengthens societies by providing boundaries and order for sexual expression, intimacy, and procreation. Conversely, deviation from God’s design inevitably results in hurt, frustration, and brokenness, and invites divine judgment. In Hebrews 13:4, the author captures both Scripture’s high view of marriage and God’s judgment for misusing sexuality when he writes, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

Genesis 3 describes Adam and Eve’s fall into sin and its effect on their bond in terms of alienation, shame, and conflict. The entire world is now under a curse. Romans 8 describes these effects in cosmic terms: “creation was subjected to futility,” and the earth is now in “bondage to corruption.” After they sin, the first couple experiences a strain in their relationship with God and profoundly disorienting changes within themselves. Significantly, one of the first results of the fall is a corruption of sexuality. In fact, awareness of their nakedness is the first



consequence of eating the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:7). Whereas Adam and Eve had been “naked and unashamed,” they are now aware of their nakedness, and their innocence is gone. But sin’s disruption extends beyond feelings of shame. Genesis 3:14-19 reveals the dire consequences of sin, particularly within their marriage. The intimate relationship between husbands and wives gives way to conflict and domineering. Rivalry, unfulfilled desires, and exploitation now plague sexuality. Childbearing—the fruit of the marital bond—will take place in the context of painful labor. In a broader context, passions and desires have been disordered. Although sexuality is supposed to lead men and women to unite in the permanent and exclusive one-flesh union of marriage, this truth is now often denied, suppressed, and disobeyed. The result is manifested in a host of consequences such as divorce, adultery, cohabitation, single-parent families, polygamy, homosexuality, rejection of biological sex distinctions, sexually transmitted infections, sterility, pornography use, prostitution, sex trafficking, and more.<sup>24</sup>

**HOMOSEXUALITY AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ARE NOW SEEN AS SOCIETAL GOODS, COMPLETELY EQUAL IN EVERY WAY TO HETEROSEXUALITY AND NATURAL MARRIAGE.**

While all these consequences deserve attention, the widespread acceptance and celebration of homosexuality and same-sex marriage today present a unique and pressing challenge to the Christian vision of marriage. While our modern culture generally

regards such practices as polygamy and adultery as societal ills, homosexuality and same-sex marriage now hold a unique place in the public square in that they are seen as societal goods, completely equal in every way to heterosexuality and natural marriage. Therefore, the subject of homosexuality deserves special attention.

Moreover, the rise of revisionist interpretations of the Bible's teaching on homosexuality merit a response. Does the Bible teach that homosexuality is a sin and contrary to God's design for sexuality? Or, are loving and committed same-sex relationships consistent with the Bible, as some recent authors have argued? In order to answer these questions, we must examine what the Bible teaches about homosexuality. Christians who believe in Scripture's authority must be able to articulate its teaching on this contentious issue.

Before looking at these verses, it is worth noting that homosexuality is not a major focus of the Bible. When the Bible does directly address the subject, it is clear and consistent in its condemnation of homosexual behavior. But what the Bible says about homosexuality is not all that it has to say to people who identify as homosexual or those in the LGBT movement. The specific passages on homosexuality must be understood in the broader context of the gospel—the message that sinful men and women can be reconciled to a holy God through repentance and faith in the completed work of Christ.

## **The Bible's Teaching on Homosexuality**

### ***Genesis 19:4-14***

Because homosexuality is traditionally considered to be a major reason for God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, the term "sodomy" has become synonymous with homosexual acts. However, recent revisionists such as Matthew Vines have argued that Sodom's sin had nothing to do with homosexuality



or consensual, committed same-sex relationships.<sup>25</sup> Rather, he contends that greed, corruption, and inhospitality were to blame for the cities' destruction. Which interpretation—the traditional or revisionist—is more faithful to what the passage teaches?

A closer look at the passage shows that Vines is right when he says committed same-sex relationships are not in view. Nor does the passage present a systematic treatment of homosexuality. Thus, if this were the only passage in the Bible that mentioned homosexuality, it would be difficult to draw definitive conclusions. However, as will be seen, there are other passages in the Old and New Testament that condemn homosexuality. Moreover, there are details in Genesis 19 that indicate homosexuality is an important element of the story and a reason for God's ultimate judgment on the city.

In the story, two angels come to Sodom to investigate the “grave sin” of the city (Gen 18:20). Abraham's nephew Lot meets the angels in the town square and invites them to spend the night in his house. Before they can retire to bed, “the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man” surround Lot's house and demand to “know” Lot's visitors (Gen 19:5). Lot refuses and offers his daughters to them instead, and the angels strike the men with blindness. The angels then instruct Lot and his family to flee the city because God is going to judge it. Once Lot is safely into the countryside, God overthrows the cities by raining down sulfur and fire (v. 24).

Several details in the passage indicate a condemnation of homosexual behavior. First, the men of the city ask Lot: “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them” (v. 5). The use of the Hebrew term *yada* (יָדָע) is significant. Translated “to know,” this term typically means “to get acquainted with.” But a principle of hermeneutics (how one interprets a text) is that context determines meaning, and the context is clear about the townspeople’s intentions. In response to the men, Lot steps out of the house, shuts the door, and begs the men “do not act so wickedly.” Lot’s rebuke is a second important detail. What would be so wicked about getting acquainted with Lot’s visitors? Clearly, Lot understands their intentions extend beyond wanting to establish a casual acquaintance. Third, Lot offers his daughters “who have not known any man” (v. 8). The horrible nature of Lot’s offer notwithstanding, the same word for “know” is used. The use of *yada* for sexual intercourse in verse 8 indicates it carries the same meaning in verse 5.

Thus, the context is clear: the men of Sodom desired to sexually force themselves on Lot’s visitors. Their intent illustrates the depravity that was characteristic of the inhabitants of the two cities.

Revisionists like Matthew Vines are quick to note that Genesis 19 is not about committed same-sex relations. In fact, Vines argues that interpretations of this passage that focus on same-sex behavior “lack a sound basis in the text.”<sup>26</sup> Instead, he says sexual violence and gang rape appear to be the main issue, and he argues that other parts of the Bible reinforce the notion that Sodom’s sin was sexual violence or inhospitality. To support his argument, Vines points to Ezekiel 16:49, which says, “this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” Homosexuality is not directly mentioned in this passage from Ezekiel. However, against Vines and other revisionist interpreters, a closer look at Ezekiel 16 shows that sexual sin,

particularly homosexuality, is still likely in view. Second Peter 2:6-7 and Jude 7 strengthen this interpretation (more on these passages will follow).



Ezekiel continues his discussion of Sodom's guilt, writing, "They were haughty and did an abomination before me" (v. 50). The Hebrew word תועבה (*toebah*), translated by the ESV, NASB, and KJV as "abomination" is rendered "detestable" by the NIV, CSB, and NLT. *Toebah* is the same word used in Leviticus to refer to homosexual acts.<sup>27</sup> Thus, while the term is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to a wide array of sins, homosexuality cannot be ruled out. In the New Testament, two passages provide further clarity that sexual immorality is at the root of Sodom's sin. In 2 Peter 2:6, Peter explains that Sodom and Gomorrah stand as an "example of what is going to happen to the ungodly." He says that Lot was rescued after being "greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked" (v. 7). Moreover, in verse 10, Peter makes a broader point about the unrighteous, noting that those who "indulge in the lust of defiling passion" will not escape judgment. In context, Peter's mention of Sodom in a passage about the sensuality of false teachers underscores the sexual nature of Sodom's crime.

## THE PERVERSION OF SEXUAL DESIRE WAS AT THE HEART OF SODOM'S SIN AND WAS A MAJOR REASON FOR GOD'S JUDGMENT.

Jude 7 is the second New Testament passage that mentions Sodom and Gomorrah, and it connects the cities' overthrow with an unnatural sexual immorality. In context, Jude is listing examples from the Old Testament of divine judgment. Having mentioned how God judged apostate Israel (v. 5) and apostate angels (v. 6), Jude mentions the apostate inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and their severe punishment. He describes the inhabitants of these cities as those who “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire” (v. 7). “Unnatural desire” is translated in the NASB as “strange flesh.” The Greek phrase, σαρκὸς ἑτέρας (*sarkos heteras*) means “different or another flesh.” Matthew Vines has argued that since “different flesh” refers to angels, Jude is condemning Sodom's townspeople for “pursuing flesh that was too different,” *i.e.*, that of angelic beings.<sup>28</sup> However, as Sam Allberry rightly notes, “But these angels appeared *as men*, and the baying crowd outside Lot's house showed no evidence of knowing they were angelic. Their desire was to have sex with the men staying with Lot.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, Jude is clear that Sodom's sin was more than attempted rape or a desire to have sex with angelic beings. Rather, the very nature of their desire was disordered. In other words, the perversion of sexual desire was at the heart of their sin and is a major reason for God's judgment. As Magnuson notes, “If homosexual acts are not the primary reason for which Sodom is indicted, they are not far from view... the fact that the men of Sodom would demand to have sex with other men is a feature of the text that demonstrates how far Sodom has fallen.”<sup>30</sup>

## *Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13*

The book of Leviticus contains two explicit prohibitions on homosexuality. They read:

*“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”* (Lev 18:22)

*“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.”* (Lev 20:13)

These verses call a sexual relationship between men an abomination. The word used in both verses is תּוֹעֵבָה (*toebah*), which is translated as “detestable” (NIV, NLT, CSB) or “abomination” (ESV, NASB, CSB, KJV). In context, both verses appear within lists prohibiting a wide range of sexually immoral behaviors. This is important because recent revisionists have claimed that the passages only condemn homosexual activity in the context of pagan worship or temple prostitution. However, the verses surrounding Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 place broad prohibitions on other forms of sexual sin, such as incest (18:6-18), bestiality (18:23), adultery (18:20, 20:10), or forcing your daughter into prostitution (19:29).

The prohibitions in Leviticus forbid even general, consensual homosexual activity. The second passage makes this evident when it says that both men have committed an abomination and shall be punished. Thus, the command is straightforward: men are prohibited from having sex with men.



In response to the plain meaning of the text, some have argued that these verses are not binding because they are part of the old covenant. The thinking runs along these lines: since Christians live under the new covenant that was inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ, these prohibitions no longer apply. However, these arguments are misleading for two reasons.<sup>31</sup>

First, the prohibitions on homosexuality are found within a literary unit that includes laws that are still relevant for Christians. These include bans on incest, adultery, child sacrifice, lying, slander, and taking God's name in vain. Also, the second great commandment—to love your neighbor as yourself—appears in this section (19:18). Surely Christians are still bound to these laws even if they are not bound to the Mosaic law.

Second, all or most of the laws dealing with sexual morality are still binding on believers. If one of the laws in Leviticus is no longer binding, there should be a New Testament passage that makes this clear. For example, in the New Testament, God explicitly repealed Old Testament laws prohibiting certain foods (see Acts 10:9-23). Likewise, laws about sacrifices were repealed, i.e., fulfilled by Christ (see Heb 10:11-14). In short, a principle of biblical interpretation is that if God does not explicitly repeal an Old Testament law, it is likely still in force. Moreover, if the New Testament repeats an Old Testament provision, it is reinforced. In the case of homosexuality, the New Testament reinforces the clear prohibition of the Old Testament.

### ***Romans 1:18-32***

According to New Testament scholar Richard Hays, Romans 1 is the “most crucial text for Christian ethics concerning homosexuality.”<sup>32</sup> This passage is significant for its clarity on the moral status of homosexuality. Paul is not evasive in this passage; he describes homosexuality as “unnatural” and a sign of God's judgment. However, before the details of the passage are analyzed, it is necessary to set the passage in its context.

Homosexuality is not the primary focus of Romans 1. Homosexual relations are illustrative of the larger concern Paul addresses, which is that the whole world is unrighteous in God's sight and in need of salvation. Paul's primary objective in Romans is to reinforce the truth that all people stand under God's judgment and need the gospel. For sinners to be reconciled to God, they must repent of their sin and turn in faith to Christ. This context is important to remember; it would be a tragic misreading of Romans 1 to rightly perceive a condemnation of homosexuality but fail to recognize God's condemnation of all human sin.

Within the context of Romans 1, the reference to homosexuality is found in verses 24-27:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

A few details of this passage are important for our study. The first is Paul's use of the creation narrative to frame his discussion of humanity's rebellion against God. Throughout verses 20-27, there are allusions to the creation account of Genesis 1-2. For example, in verse 20, Paul explains that God has been revealing himself since "the creation of the world." In verse 25, Paul refers to God as the "Creator." In verse 23, Paul borrows five terms directly from the Greek translation of Genesis 1:26 (a translation used by Jews in the first century).<sup>33</sup>

Paul's choice of language in Romans 1:26-27 underscores the connection to Genesis 1. In these verses, Paul uses the terms θῆλυς (*thēlys*, female) and ἄρσεν (arsēn, male) instead of the more common words for woman and man, γυνή (*gynē*, woman) and ἀνὴρ (*anēr*, man). Noting Paul's editorial decision on this point, New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner explains, "In doing so he drew on the creation account of Genesis, which uses the same words. These words emphasize the sexual distinctiveness of male and female, suggesting that sexual relations with the same sex violate the distinctions that God intended in the creation of man and woman."<sup>34</sup> In the context of the chapter, Paul is concerned about humanity's rejection of the Creator. One evidence of this rejection is the rejection of sexual distinctions, which are an integral part of the created order. For Paul, the corruption of sexuality and humanity's rejection of male-female complementarity are indicative of a departure from God's purposes in creation.

Second, the "exchange" language in this passage emphasizes humanity's rejection of God and the created order. Paul gives three examples of how what has been known about God has been exchanged for something else. First, Paul says humanity has "exchanged" the glory of God for "images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (v. 23). Second, man "exchanged" the truth about God for a lie (v. 25). Third, women have "exchanged" natural sexual relations for those that are "contrary to nature" (v. 26), and "likewise," the men "gave up natural relations with women" for unnatural relations (v. 27). As Hays explains, "The deliberate repetition of the verb *metēllaxan* [exchanged] forges a powerful link between the rebellion against God and the 'shameless acts' (1:27) that are themselves both evidence and consequences of that rebellion."<sup>35</sup> The presence of false images, lies, and unnatural relations not only show that a rebellion against God is being waged; their very existence is the result of turning away from God's plans and purposes for His creation.

**ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIGN, SEXUALITY EXISTS TO  
DRAW MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER IN MARRIAGE.  
HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONS UPEND THIS DESIGN.**

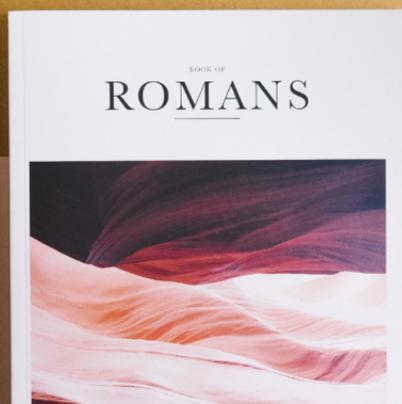
Third, while describing the sinful “exchanges” men and women have made, Paul introduces the term *παρά φύσιν* (*para physin*) in verse 26. This phrase means “unnatural” or “against nature.” In context, Paul says women “exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature (*para physin*).” What does Paul mean by “nature,” and from where does the term come?

A study of Greco-Roman and Jewish writers from the first century demonstrates that *para physin* referred to same-sex activity. The phrase was often juxtaposed and used alongside *kata physin* (“natural”) as a way of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual behavior.<sup>36</sup> According to Josephus, the marriage of a man and a woman was *kata physin* (natural), whereas same-sex activity was *para physin* (against nature). Philo, a first-century Jewish philosopher, also criticized homosexual relations as *para physin*.<sup>37</sup> In this context, Paul’s negative assessment of homosexual relations and use of *para physin* aligns with his Jewish and Greco-Roman contemporaries.

In short, the semantic and linguistic evidence does not support revisionists who would argue that “against nature” refers to homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons. For Paul, same-sex relations were against God’s design and intention for human sexuality and a violation of the created order. Sexuality exists to draw men and women together in marriage; homosexual relations upend this design. Thus, in these verses, Paul upholds and reaffirms the Old Testament’s prohibition on homosexual behavior. Moreover, the wording of verses 26-27 is not restricted to a specific kind of homosexuality, such as pederasty. Instead, Paul gives a general proscription for all homosexual behavior.

Fourth, homosexuality is a consequence of humanity suppressing God's truth and refusing to honor Him, and its consequences are a sign of God's judgment. According to Paul's argument in verses 18-32, a consequence of humanity's rejection of God is that God "gives them over" to their desires. In response to humanity's suppression of God's truth (v. 18) and refusal to honor Him (v. 21), God allows people to experience the consequences of their sin—a form of judgment. Three times the passage says, "God gave them up" (v. 24, 26, 28). In each case, the "giving over" results in an intensification of sin and a further breakdown of human behavior. After man exchanges worship of the Creator for the creature, God gives him up to dishonorable bodily conduct (v. 24) and "dishonorable passions" (v. 26). The exchanging of natural relations for unnatural ones leads to being given up to a "debased mind" (v. 28) and unrighteous practices (v. 29). Paul's analysis leads to a sobering conclusion: flagrant, high-handed, and unrepentant sin—including homosexual activity—is evidence of God's present-day wrath. In other words, rampant human wickedness is evidence of God's judgment already at work in the world. The flouting of sexual distinctions and homosexual activity are indicators of this judgment.

On this last point, it is important to understand that Paul is not saying the mere presence of same-sex attraction on a personal level means someone is further away from God than someone who struggles in another area. We live in a Genesis 3



world where the effects of sin disorient our deepest affections, motivations, and inclinations.<sup>38</sup> In Romans 1, Paul is speaking in societal terms. He is saying that as society tolerates and even celebrates high-handed sins, God allows that community to experience the consequences of their sin.

**HYPOCRITICAL CONDEMNATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY  
BY THOSE WHO ARE THEMSELVES GUILTY OF SEXUAL  
SINS IS JUST AS SINFUL AS HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR.**

Finally, it is worth noting how Romans 1:18-32 sets up Paul's condemnation of all human sin. Paul's Jewish readers would have readily agreed with his assessment of homosexuality. As Jews, they despised the idol-worshipping Gentiles and were happy to condemn them. But in Romans 2:1, Paul turns the tables on these would-be-judges. He writes, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things." Paul contends that all people—Jews and Gentiles—stand under the just condemnation of God. Self-righteous and hypocritical condemnation of homosexuality, especially by those who are themselves guilty of sexual sins, is just as sinful as homosexual behavior and has the same effect of separating people from God. Everyone stands in desperate need of God's grace. This does not mitigate the sinfulness of homosexuality, but it does provide a balanced perspective that those in both the LGBT and church communities need to hear.

***1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10***

The New Testament contains two additional passages that address homosexuality. Both appear in "vice lists." In context, they read:

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. (1 Cor 6:9-10)

...the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine... (1 Tim 1:9-10)

These verses are significant for understanding the Bible's teaching on homosexuality. Notably, they affirm the Old Testament's prohibition on same-sex relations. Although each passage merits a lengthy discussion, here only the most important details will be noted.

First, in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul lists different kinds of people who will be excluded from the kingdom of God unless they repent. In the list, Paul includes four references to sexual sin, including two that mention homosexual behavior. The relevant terms are *μαλακοὶ* (*malakoi*) and *ἄρσενοκοῖται* (*arsenokoitai*). Rightly interpreting these terms is crucial to understanding what Paul teaches about homosexuality.

English translators render the relevant terms in various ways. Some translations combine the terms, whereas others render the words separately. Consider a few examples:

- ESV: “men who practice homosexuality”
- NASB (1995): “effeminate” and “homosexuals”
- KJV: “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind”

- NLT: “male prostitutes” and “[those who] practice homosexuality”
- NIV (1984): “male prostitutes” and “homosexual offenders”
- NIV (2011): “men who have sex with men”

Although space does not allow for a lengthy treatment of these terms,<sup>39</sup> a few points should be made. First, *malakoi* had a wide range of meaning in the ancient world. Often it meant “effeminate” or “soft.” It was also used in Hellenistic Greek as pejorative slang to describe “passive” partners in homosexual activity.<sup>40</sup> At first glance, it might seem challenging to ascertain Paul’s exact use of the term in this passage. However, context is key. And the context of 1 Corinthians 6 with its mention and condemnation of sexual sin indicates Paul is using the term to refer to passive partners in homosexual relations. This becomes clear by the placement of *malakoi* alongside *arsenokoitai*.

The second term under consideration is *arsenokoitai*, a compound word formed by combining *arsen* (“male”) and *koites* (“bed”). These terms are found in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, passages that prohibit homosexual relations (see previous discussion). Leviticus 20:13 says, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman [*meta arsenos koiten gynaikos*], both of them have committed an abomination.” As Magnuson notes, this is “very strong evidence that *arsenokoites* is derived from *arsenos koiten* in this text, and that it refers to males having sex with males.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, it seems that Paul had the Leviticus passages in mind when writing to the Corinthians. When paired with *malakoi*, it is almost certain that *arsenokoitai* refers to the active partner in a homosexual relationship. By using these terms together, Paul includes both active and passive homosexual partners within his list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, in 1 Timothy 1, Paul includes *arsenokoitai* (translated by the ESV as “men who practice homosexuality”) on a list that includes sins (sexual and non-sexual) that do not conform

to “sound doctrine” (v. 10). God’s law exposes these sins, and believers are exhorted to not participate in any activity that discredits the gospel or dishonors God (v. 11). Christians should repent of sin and pursue a life that is consistent with their new identity in Christ. It is worth noting that Paul once again presumes the Old Testament’s prohibition on homosexual relations.

## **JESUS AND HOMOSEXUALITY**

What was Jesus’ position on homosexuality? This is a common question. Because Jesus did not directly address homosexuality, some have argued that He would have affirmed same-sex unions. However, this is an argument from silence and is unpersuasive. Notably, Jesus says nothing about rape, bestiality, or incest, and yet no one believes He endorsed these practices. Others appeal to an ethic of love: Jesus would have supported same-sex relationships because His core message was one of love, and it is unloving to deny people who identify as homosexual opportunities for love and companionship. Despite its emotional appeal, this argument is also unpersuasive and ignores the available evidence that strongly suggests Jesus would not affirm same-sex relations. Two points are worth noting:

**ALTHOUGH JESUS DID NOT DIRECTLY ADDRESS  
HOMOSEXUALITY, HE BELIEVED IN THE BINDING  
AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES AND  
AFFIRMED THE CREATION PATTERN FOR MARRIAGE.**

First, Jesus believed in the binding authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Mat 5:17). He also said, “Whoever relaxes one of the least of

these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 5:19). In short, Jesus upheld the requirements of the Old Testament law. For example, when He heals a leper in Matthew 8, He tells him to go to a priest and “offer the gift that Moses commanded” as Leviticus 13 requires (Mat 8:4). On the few occasions Jesus “adjusted” Old Testament provisions—such as when He limits the grounds for divorce to sexual immorality in Matthew 19—the New Testament is very clear.<sup>43</sup> Because Jesus did not indicate otherwise, the only logical conclusion is that He was fully in agreement with the sexual ethics of the Old Testament and His Jewish heritage. To assume otherwise is an unwarranted argument from silence.

Second, Jesus affirmed the creation pattern for marriage. When the Pharisees question Jesus about divorce in Mark 10, He responds by quoting Genesis 1 and 2. He says, “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:7-8; cf. Mat 19:4-6). According to Jesus, married couples should not divorce because marriage is a one-flesh relationship. He affirms the one-flesh nature of marriage by citing Genesis 2:24. But significantly, He also affirms the sexual differentiation of male and female—sometimes described as the “gender binary”—by quoting Genesis 1:27. As Ken Magnuson notes, “If sexual difference, in terms of marriage and sexual relations, was unimportant to Jesus, there was no need for him to cite Genesis 1:27.”<sup>44</sup> By drawing attention to humanity’s creation as “male and female” in the context of a discussion on marriage, Jesus signals His acceptance of the Old Testament’s vision for marriage and sexuality.

## TRANSGENDERISM

Another departure from God’s design for sexuality is transgenderism, which represents the latest step in the moral revolution. Not surprisingly, ideology promoted by transgender activists has been accepted and endorsed by cultural and political elites with breathtaking speed. Hardly a day goes by when an issue related to transgenderism is not raised in the news. For example, on June 15, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a 6-3 decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*.<sup>45</sup> The majority ruled that employment discrimination “on the basis of sex”—prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—should be understood to include actions based on “sexual orientation” and “gender identity.” By reinterpreting the statute in this way, the Court essentially rewrote civil rights law.

Another recent story includes British author J.K. Rowling, who sparked a furor on June 6, 2020, for writing a series of tweets explaining why she opposed redefining the word “sex” to include “gender identity.” She said, “I know and love trans people, but erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives... my life has been shaped by being female. I do not believe it’s hateful to say so.”<sup>46</sup> In March 2019, tennis legend Martina Navratilova was forced to apologize and lost corporate sponsors for saying, “letting men compete as women simply if they change their name and take hormones is unfair.”<sup>47</sup> In February 2019, two 17-year-old biological boys took first and second place at the Connecticut girls’ indoor track state championship.<sup>48</sup> And in 2017, President Trump announced



that he would reverse a 2016 Obama administration decision and return to the previous policy of barring people who identify as transgender from military service. Although the policy was rooted in well-documented concerns about mental and physical health, deployability, and military readiness, critics cried foul and alleged that the policy is discriminatory.

These stories, and others like them, reflect the rising visibility and acceptance of transgenderism in our culture and point to a dramatic moral shift in society. What accounts for the rising acceptance of transgender ideology and the growing desire to recognize “gender identity” as a protected class? Many cultural observers point to Bruce Jenner’s *20/20* television interview with Diane Sawyer in 2015 as the moment when transgenderism officially entered the mainstream of society. During the interview, Jenner, the 1976 Olympic champion of the decathlon, announced that God had given him “the soul of a female.” Five weeks later, Jenner changed his name to “Caitlyn.”<sup>49</sup> Also bolstering the acceptance of transgender ideology is likely the increased personal connection many Americans now have with individuals who identify as transgender. According to the Human Rights Campaign, an LGBT rights organization, whereas only 17 percent of likely voters knew a transgender person in 2014, that number had increased to 35 percent in 2016.<sup>50</sup>

Policy debates related to transgenderism that would have been implausible as recently as President Obama’s first term have become commonplace. For many parents, the implications of this debate have hit close to home, as parental rights are now threatened by the heavy-handed enforcement of transgender ideology. For example, in February 2018, an Ohio judge removed a 17-year-old from the custody of her parents after the parents refused to support their daughter’s desire to transition genders. The judge awarded custody to the child’s grandparents, who affirmed the girl’s desire to use hormone therapy as part of her transition.<sup>51</sup>

A similar challenge to parental rights is the decision by some school districts to allow children to socially transition to a different gender identity at school without parental notice or consent. In one recent example, the Madison Metropolitan School District in Wisconsin instituted a policy that encouraged teachers and administrators to use alternative names and pronouns for children at school without parental consent. The school district even instructed teachers and staff to deceive parents by reverting to the child's birth name and corresponding pronouns whenever the child's parents are nearby.<sup>52</sup>

It is important to recognize that the principal philosophical underpinning of transgender ideology is an anthropology influenced by Gnosticism. This teaching posits a distinction between the biological reality of sex and the subjective, internal feeling of gender identity. According to transgender ideology, "sex" refers to the physical body (including the reproductive system), while "gender" refers to a person's inner perception of themselves, *i.e.*, their identification with either maleness or femaleness. This distinction would have been incomprehensible to previous generations, and it represents a decidedly postmodern perspective on human embodiment.



In a paradigm where subjective feelings and personal experience supersede biology and anatomy, sex is reduced to a social construct, and what fundamentally differentiates men and women is obliterated. It is sometimes claimed that the transgender paradigm is rooted in the latest scientific findings, but the claim is a deceptive one. The mere observation that some people experience psychological gender dysphoria may be considered scientific. But the conclusion some draw from that observation—that such subjective psychological feelings are a more fundamental determinant of a person’s identity as male or female than objective biology—is nothing but an ideologically driven opinion, not a scientific finding.

The truth about sexual differences cannot and should not be erased. Genetically, men have XY chromosomes; women have XX chromosomes. Thus, when a male asserts that he is female, he asserts an objective falsehood in terms of biology and genetics. Increasingly, many who suffer from gender dysphoria opt for “gender reassignment surgery,” which includes hormone treatment, breast surgery (removal or implants), other cosmetic surgery, and genital reconstruction. Unfortunately, these surgeries can be painful, can cause harm (including infertility and incontinence), and often are not successful in alleviating the mental anguish of those who undergo them.<sup>53</sup> The rise in “detransitioners”—those who previously identified as transgender but who have reverted to identifying with their biological sex—underscores the risks and dissatisfaction that result from these surgeries.

**IN A WORLD DISORDERED BY SIN, THE GOODNESS OF THE BODY MAY BE DIFFICULT FOR MANY TO AFFIRM, AND THE CHURCH SHOULD SHOW GRACE TO THOSE WHO STRUGGLE WITH ACCEPTING THEIR BODIES.**

A person who identifies as transgender is experiencing acute alienation from their body; there is a profound disassociation between their mind and body. But gender transition surgery cannot change the fundamental reality of biological sex. It cannot alter a person's genetic blueprint, and while genital surgery may sterilize an individual, it cannot bestow the reproductive capacity of the opposite sex. Therefore, a person remains in their biological sex regardless of the gender with which they choose to identify.

Against the body-denying claims of transgender activists, the biblical worldview affirms the goodness of the material creation and the human body. The doctrines of creation, incarnation, and bodily resurrection provide strong theological affirmation of our physical bodies. Against Gnosticism, the Bible affirms the goodness of creation in its first chapter. Genesis 1:31 says that everything God created, including the human body, was "very good." The Bible's teaching about Jesus' incarnation also teaches a high view of the physical body. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, assumed a human body. Significantly, His physical body was not a mere receptacle that His "real self" temporarily filled or inhabited. Instead, Jesus' resurrection and ascension affirm the permanent nature of His embodiment. In other words, Jesus' body is an inseparable part of His person. This is true for us as well; our bodies are essential, integral components of who we are. Thus, we should see our created bodies as part of God's creation (including our maleness or femaleness). In a world disordered by humanity's fall into sin, the goodness of the body may be difficult for many to affirm, and the church should show grace to those who struggle with accepting their bodies. However, on these contested issues, Christians must speak the truth in love by refusing to compromise clear biblical teaching.

## CHURCH HISTORY

It can often seem like theologically conservative Christians are standing alone in discussions about sexuality and how the church should respond. Professing Christians in theologically liberal denominations amplify this sense of aloneness when they claim that the Bible supports same-sex relations and that homosexuality is not sinful.

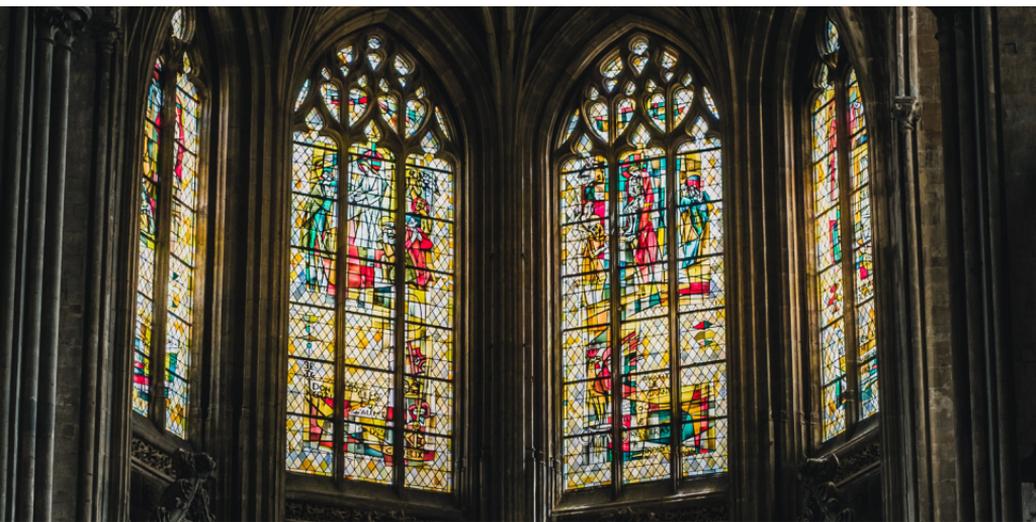
**THE CHURCH HAS BEEN CLEAR AND CONSISTENT ON HUMAN SEXUALITY SINCE THE FIRST CENTURY.**

Yet the scriptural teachings on marriage and sexuality discussed in this publication are not a historically minority opinion or the view of an isolated denomination or sect. Indeed, a brief survey of church history reveals that the church has been clear and consistent on human sexuality since the first century. For 2,000 years, Christians have interpreted the Bible consistently on the design and purpose of sexuality, and nearly every prominent leader and authority in the history of Christianity—whether theologians, pastors, or church councils—have publicly opposed the redefinition of marriage.

It is quite significant that despite varying circumstances, pressures, and disagreement on other significant theological issues, the Christian church has spoken with one voice in consistently affirming God's design and plan for marriage as laid out in Genesis 1-2. What follows is a brief survey of what Christian leaders have taught about the nature of marriage and sexuality, as well as what they have believed and taught on the moral status of homosexuality.

## Early Church

The Bible's teaching on marriage and sexuality stood in stark contrast to the practices of the Greco-Roman culture in which Christianity arose. This contrast put Christians at odds with many of their contemporaries. One of the earliest works in Christian apologetics, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, summarized Christian sexual ethics by saying, "They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed."<sup>54</sup> Early Christians distinguished themselves from the surrounding culture by maintaining a high view of life and marriage and rejecting sexual promiscuity. They also opposed homosexuality out of a conviction that the Bible expressly condemned it.



Following the lead of Scripture, early church leaders celebrated marriage. In their teachings, they stressed the goodness of marriage and explained its boundaries; adultery and fornication transgressed God's moral law, and Christians should avoid sexual immorality. Early Christian writers were clear that the appropriate context for sexual intimacy was marriage. For example, Tertullian (155-220) argued that Christians surpassed

the pagans in the “virtue of chastity,” saying, “The Christian [man] confines himself to the female sex... The Christian husband has nothing to do with any but his own wife.”<sup>55</sup>



*Tertullian*

Elsewhere, in a letter to his wife, Tertullian reflected on the beauty of marriage, writing, “How beautiful, then, the marriage of two Christians, two who are one in hope, one in desire, one in the way of life they follow, one in the religion they practice. They are as brother and sister, both servants of the same Master. Nothing divides them, either in flesh or in Spirit. They are in very truth, two in one flesh; and where there is but one flesh there is also but one spirit.”<sup>56</sup> Against certain strains of Gnosticism that denounced marriage as sinful, Tertullian argued for the goodness of marriage, especially between Christians.



*Asterius of Amasea*

Asterius of Amasea (350-410) is another leader who affirmed the Bible’s teaching on marriage. His views can be discerned in a sermon he preached on the topic of divorce. In short, Asterius believed God was responsible for bringing couples together in marriage and opposed divorce based on Matthew 19:6. He explained, “The Creator was the first bestower of the bride in marriage, since he joined the first human beings in the marriage bond, giving to those who should come after, the inflexible ordinance of the conjugal life, which must be recognized as the law of God; and they who are thus associated with one another are no longer two, but one flesh, so that ‘What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.’”<sup>57</sup> Asterius believed Scripture should inform how Christians think about the purposes and nature of marriage as well as divorce.



*Augustine*

Augustine (354-430), the well-known Bishop of Hippo, also affirmed a high view of marriage. In fact, his views (expressed in treatises such as *On the Good of Marriage*) helped provide the theological framework for the Western tradition's perspective on marriage. Reflecting on the nature of marriage, he explains, "Beyond any doubt the reality signified by this sacrament is that the man and the woman united in marriage persevere inseparably in that union as long as they live... that is, after all, what is preserved between Christ and the Church, that while Christ lives and while the Church lives, they are not separated by any divorce for all eternity."<sup>58</sup> Augustine, like other early leaders of the church, believed marriage reflects the relationship between Christ and His church and is therefore indissoluble.

As early as the first and second centuries Christian literature listed sodomy among sins that must be avoided. For example, the *Didache* (AD 50-120) reads: "[T]hou shalt not commit sodomy; thou shalt not commit fornication."<sup>59</sup> The *Epistle of Barnabas* (written between AD 70-132) also includes a reference to homosexual activity among its prohibited list of behaviors.<sup>60</sup>



*Origen*

Origen (184-253) cites Romans 1:26-27 when he mentions homosexuality in his writings. In a discussion of Christian belief and practice, he says that even theologically untrained Christians "often exhibit in their character a high degree of gravity, purity, and integrity; while those who call themselves wise have despised these virtues and have wallowed in the filth of sodomy, in lawless lust, 'men with men doing that which is unseemly.'"<sup>61</sup> Origen's characterization of homosexual relations follows Paul's logic in Romans 1. Without knowledge of God, unbelievers turn away from the natural order of creation and commit "unseemly" acts.

Other early Christian leaders spoke out against homosexuality. For example, while commenting on the unlawful sexual relations mentioned in Leviticus 18, Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339) says the passage forbids “all unlawful marriage, and all unseemly practice, and the union of women with women and men with men.”<sup>62</sup> Likewise, Basil the Great (330-379) wrote, “He who is guilty of unseemliness with males will be under discipline for the same time as adulterers.”<sup>63</sup> In a homily on Romans 1:26-27, John Chrysostom (c.347-407) also disapproved of homosexuality. Using a variety of descriptions, he says same-sex relations are “shameful deeds,” “an insult to nature itself,” “contrary to nature,” “lawless love,” a “grievous evil,” and “unseemly.”<sup>64</sup> Chrysostom’s strong denunciation stems from his understanding of God’s purposes for marriage laid out in Genesis 2.<sup>65</sup>

Augustine also took a firm position on homosexuality. He wrote, “Therefore shameful acts which are contrary to nature, such as the acts of the Sodomites (Gen 19:5ff.), are everywhere and always to be detested and punished. Even if all peoples should do them, they would be liable to the same condemnation by divine law; for it has not made men to use one another in this way.”<sup>66</sup> He continues, “Indeed the social bond which should exist between God and us is violated when the nature of which he is the author is polluted by a perversion of sexual desire.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, we see Augustine believed homosexuality was “contrary to nature” and a “perversion of sexual desire.” In his conclusions, the bishop appears to be drawing from Genesis 19:5 and Romans 1:26-27. Clearly, Augustine believed men should not use one another sexually in a way that is contrary to the design and purpose of sexuality.

## *Post-Reformation*

Even after the Reformation, the resulting theological camps remained committed to the Bible's teaching on marriage and sexuality. Writings from the period reveal deep reflection upon what the Scriptures taught about the nature of marriage and its purpose. Martin Luther (1483-1546) once explained, "There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage."



*John Calvin*

John Calvin (1509-1564) wrote about and preached on the topic of marriage. In one sermon, using Ephesians 5:28 as his text, he explained, "God is the founder of marriage, when a marriage takes place between a man and a woman, God presides and requires a mutual pledge from both... Marriage is not a thing ordained by men. We know that God is the author of it, and that it is solemnized in His name. The Scripture says that it is a holy covenant, and therefore calls it divine."<sup>68</sup> For Calvin, marriage is sacred because it was ordained by God. Moreover, the marriage between a man and a woman reflects God's relationship with the church. On this point, Calvin says, "Marriage was appointed by God on the condition that the two should be one flesh; and that this unity may be the more sacred, he again recommends it to our notice by the consideration of Christ and His church."<sup>69</sup>

The Bible's teaching on marriage is conveyed in Protestant confessions of faith written in the seventeenth century. For example, in the *Second London Confession of Faith* (1689), English Baptists defined marriage as the relationship "between one man and one woman," and explained that neither party may have more than one spouse at a given time.<sup>70</sup> The confession goes on to delineate the purposes of marriage, which include the "mutual help" of the husband and wife, "the increase of mankind," *i.e.*, procreation, and the prevention of "sexual uncleanness," meaning



husbands and wives should enjoy a sexual relationship to keep them from stumbling into the sin of lust.

After the Reformation, leading Protestant and Catholic leaders also discussed homosexuality in their writings. In his commentary on Romans, John Calvin describes homosexuality as “the dreadful crime of unnatural lust.” He says the men Paul refers to in Romans 1 “not only abandoned themselves to beastly lusts, but became degraded beyond the beasts, since they reversed the whole order of nature.”<sup>71</sup> For Calvin, the “order of nature” demonstrates that homosexuality is a corruption of sexuality. Moreover, he refers to Paul’s listing of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as “the most abominable of all—that monstrous pollution which was but too prevalent in Greece.”<sup>72</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church has likewise upheld a biblical sexual ethic and continued to affirm the Bible’s clear teaching on marriage and human sexuality. For example, the Catechism of the Council of Trent (1566) includes the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9 among “sins against chastity” that are forbidden.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, the Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms the complementarity of God’s creation of the sexes. According to the Catechism, “In their ‘being-man’ and ‘being-woman,’ they

reflect the creator's wisdom and goodness."<sup>74</sup> Not only does the Catechism teach that God created man and woman, but it also clarifies how the creation of male and female coincides with marriage, noting, "Man and woman were made 'for each other'—not that God left them half made and incomplete: He created them to be a communion of persons... for they are equal as persons...and complementary as masculine and feminine."<sup>75</sup>

In 2009, as the debate over same-sex marriage grew, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reaffirmed their church's definition of marriage, stating, "The Church has taught through the ages that marriage is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman."<sup>76</sup> From the perspective of the bishops, the Bible's teaching on the nature and purpose of marriage is clear and the church's position cannot be redefined or altered because of political or cultural pressure.

## Modern Church

Christian teaching on homosexuality remained unbroken into the twentieth century. In 1951, Karl Barth reflected the prevailing view of Christian theologians when he said, "the decisive word of Christian ethics



must consist of a warning against entering upon the whole way of life which can only end in the tragedy of concrete homosexuality."<sup>77</sup> This remained the view of every Christian denomination until the latter half of the twentieth century. Only then, at the height of the sexual revolution, did many mainline Protestant denominations such as the Episcopal Church,

Presbyterian Church (USA), and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America change their view on homosexuality.<sup>78</sup> Significantly, the churches that changed their view on the nature of marriage during this time were the same churches that, since the 1920s, had increasingly embraced theological liberalism. The correlation between rejecting the Bible as God's infallible and authoritative Word (which also means rejecting the Bible's accounts of miracles, the deity of Christ, and the historical reliability of the Bible) and the acceptance of homosexuality is striking, given that denominations that continued to believe the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible remained committed to Christianity's historic teaching on sexuality.

For example, the Roman Catholic Church<sup>79</sup> and theologically conservative Protestant denominations such as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,<sup>80</sup> Presbyterian Church in America (PCA),<sup>81</sup> Assemblies of God,<sup>82</sup> the Southern Baptist Convention,<sup>83</sup> and many others, stand with their theological forbearers and remain committed to the Bible's teaching on sexuality.

The same is true for the Orthodox Church, which has consistently held a biblical view on marriage. In 2003, the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) released a statement on the subject. They explained, "The Orthodox Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality, firmly grounded in Holy Scripture, 2000 years of church tradition, and canon law, holds that marriage consists in the conjugal union of a man and a woman, and that authentic marriage is blessed by God as a sacrament of the Church. Neither Scripture nor Holy Tradition blesses or sanctions such a union between persons of the same sex."<sup>84</sup> The Orthodox base their understanding of marriage and sexuality on Scripture and their church's historic teaching.

## Gospel Hope for the Future

Christians must speak the truth with courage, conviction, kindness, and love, recognizing the deeply personal nature of marriage and sexuality. The gospel is good news for all people, including those who struggle with their sexuality, those who experience unwanted same-sex attraction, and those who engage in homosexual conduct.

After reading this publication's explanation of the Bible's teaching about sexuality—and especially after reading the strong words from early church leaders—it is possible that a reader who experiences same-sex attraction will feel disheartened or discouraged. It is, therefore, important to remember the full context of the verses we have considered. We must remember that the Bible's teaching on sexuality is something we all need to hear, but it is not *all* we need to hear. Scripture teaches that homosexual practice is contrary to God's design for sexuality, but this is not the Bible's central focus. Homosexuality, along with fornication, adultery, lust, greed, and a catalog of other sins, are all signs of living in a fallen world where even our deepest thoughts and desires are confused. Christians ought to understand this dynamic better than anyone and be the first to respond to hurting people with grace and mercy.

Unfortunately, this has not always been the case. Some in the LGBT community have had negative experiences with the church, and as a result, believe Christians are mean, judgmental, and hateful. Admittedly, some Christians have been unkind, unloving, and even hateful toward people who identify as LGBT. And we should be honest about our own shortcomings in this regard. Scripture says Christians should be known by their love (John 13:35). If we have failed to properly show love to our neighbors who identify as LGBT, we ought to repent and seek forgiveness. As those filled with God's Spirit, followers of Jesus should be marked by their joy, patience, kindness, and gentleness (Gal 5:22-23), not anger, vitriol, or lack of empathy.

The church ought to be the place where all people can hear the gospel, find people willing to share their burdens and struggles, and learn what it means to find their identity in Christ. When individual Christians or the church-at-large fails to treat their LGBT-identifying neighbors with true dignity or neglect to offer them the full gospel, they are not only failing LGBT-identifying people, they are failing to live out the second great commandment (Mat 22:39) and Great Commission (Mat 28:16-20). The church should stand as a pinnacle of clarity and hope, affirming God's design for humanity amidst the confusion of our various experiences and proclaiming God's faithfulness to rescue us from our sin.

## Current Challenges

Even though Christians have believed, taught, and endeavored to live out God's design for marriage and sexuality for 2,000 years, these teachings are now condemned as discriminatory by those leading the moral revolution. The convictions outlined in this publication on the nature and purpose of sexuality are not only ridiculed as outdated, but also are seen by many in the spheres of government, higher education, and media as dangerous and harmful. The movement to paint orthodox Christian beliefs about marriage, gender, and sexuality as intolerant is a strategic push to drive Christians out of the public square. Ironically, these efforts have resulted in increased intolerance on the part of secularists toward Christians who want to live their lives in accordance with their deeply held religious beliefs.



Consider the following examples, which illustrate the current challenges facing Christians in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

In 2014, attorneys for the city of Houston attempted to subpoena the sermons of pastors who opposed a nondiscrimination ordinance that allowed members of the opposite sex into each other's restrooms. The intended subpoena ordered pastors to hand over any communications that mentioned homosexuality, gender identity, and the nondiscrimination law. After national outrage, the request was dropped. But the attempted overreach by city officials sent a clear message: not even the church was off-limits from the ideological tidal wave of LGBT activism.

In 2015, only two weeks after the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in its *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, *New York Times* columnist Mark Oppenheimer called for the removal of tax-exempt status from churches that refuse to endorse same-sex marriage.<sup>85</sup> This call confirmed the fears of many, including Justice Samuel Alito, who had warned in his *Obergefell* dissent that the majority's decision would be used "to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy."<sup>86</sup>

Unfortunately, threats against churches and other organizations guided by sincere religious convictions on marriage and sexuality continue. In October 2019, then-presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke argued in a CNN-sponsored town hall that churches and religious organizations that oppose same-sex marriage should lose their tax-exempt status. In February 2020, another candidate, Pete Buttigieg, stated that, regardless of religious liberty concerns, religious and non-profit organizations like colleges and homeless charities should lose their federal funding if they refuse to hire LGBT-identifying people. Comments like these are indicative of a political landscape increasingly antagonistic to those with religious convictions at odds with LGBT ideology. The message to faith-based adoption agencies, hospitals, charities, and universities is clear: unless you embrace

and subscribe to the new orthodoxy on contested matters related to marriage and gender identity, you will be blacklisted, targeted, and ultimately run out of business.

Additional challenges to religious liberty and free speech relating to sexuality exist. While some of these developments do not directly affect pastors or churches, they have implications for members in every congregation.

For example, there is immense political pressure to enact legislation at the federal, state, and local level that undermines religious liberty protections for those who hold biblically informed views on human sexuality. In May 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Equality Act, which would codify “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” as protected classes equal to race and national origin in U.S. civil rights law.<sup>87</sup> In addition to forcing this ideological mandate on the entire country, the legislation would block access to the courts granted by the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act to someone who believes the government has infringed on their right to religious freedom. If the Equality Act were to become law, the government could compel Christians and members of any faith with objections to same-sex marriage and homosexuality to violate their religious beliefs in a variety of ways. Even though the Equality Act represents a clear violation of the religious liberty of millions of Americans, it passed the House of Representatives by a 236-173 vote.<sup>88</sup>



Second, people of faith—particularly those in the wedding vendor industry—are increasingly under legal pressure to compromise their beliefs in the workplace. Consider the cases of florist Barronelle Stutzman, baker Jack Phillips, and calligraphers Joanna Duka and Breanna Koski. Each of these small business owners has spent years in court fighting to protect their right to live out their faith through their work. In the case of Joanna and Breanna, the two artists lived in a city with a Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity ordinance that could have required them to either participate in events and communicate messages that violated their conscience or face criminal penalties.<sup>89</sup> Thankfully, in September 2019, the Arizona Supreme Court ruled that the local government could not use a criminal law to force Joanna and Breanna to design and create custom wedding invitations expressing messages that conflict with their core beliefs. Ongoing litigation in this area demonstrates that continued threats confront Christians who want to live out their faith in the public square.

These stories underscore how quickly society's views on morality are changing. They also provide a sobering reminder of the mounting challenges facing those who hold to a biblical sexual ethic.

## Conclusion

In Matthew 11, Jesus extends an invitation to His listeners: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (v. 28-30). Throughout the centuries, Christians facing all sorts of difficulties and challenges have found comfort in Jesus’ promise to give rest. This promise still stands, which is good news for all of us, especially those who grapple most acutely with the burdens of living in a sexually broken world.

## THE GOSPEL HAS THE POWER TO SAVE. THEREFORE, WE MUST CONTEND FOR IT.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. But immediately after condemning those living in habitual, unrepentant sin, he reminds his readers of the gospel and their identity in Christ. Some of his readers once practiced these things—“such were some of you.” But not anymore. Paul can now say to these former habitual sinners—including those who practiced homosexuality—“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). When someone comes to Christ, there is a transformation in identity. This was true in first-century Corinth, and it is still true today.

The gospel has the power to save. Therefore, we must contend for it. As Jude exhorts his readers, we must “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). We must commit ourselves to contend for the whole counsel of God’s Word, including biblical sexual ethics, which are under constant assault. This defense is the responsibility of all Christians, but especially those tasked with preaching God’s Word and leading God’s people.

Arizona calligrapher Joanna Duka faced lawsuits because of her stand for marriage. Her religious liberty case went all the way to the state supreme court. When asked what she needed from her pastor in the face of these lawsuits, Joanna said, “I needed to know what the truth is about marriage and sexuality. I needed to be hearing from the pulpit what God says and what His heart is because we’re facing these issues every day.”<sup>90</sup>

Joanna is right. In the face of increasing social, political, and legal pressure to succumb to the moral revolution, all Christians, but especially pastors, must remain committed to God's Word and its teaching on marriage and human sexuality. As evidenced in this publication, the Bible has clear answers on these subjects, and faithfulness requires nothing less than upholding, teaching, and defending these truths in a loving manner. This will not be easy, but it is necessary for the witness of the church, the flourishing of individuals, and the good of society.



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- 1 George Barna, "Perceptions about Biblical Worldview and Its Application: A National Survey from the Center for Biblical Worldview," Family Research Council, 2021. Available online at [FRC.org/WorldviewSurvey](https://www.frc.org/WorldviewSurvey).
- 2 Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2018), 700.
- 3 On June 15, 2020, U.S. Supreme Court handed down a 6-3 decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*. The majority ruled that discrimination "on the basis of sex"—prohibited by the Civil Rights Act of 1964—should be understood to include sexual orientation and gender identity. The opinion can be accessed at [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618\\_hfci.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618_hfci.pdf).
- 4 "Hostility to Religion: The Growing Threat to Religious Liberty in the United States," Family Research Council, June 2017, <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF17F51.pdf>.
- 5 R. Albert Mohler Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 11.
- 6 Albert Mohler mentions these and other factors in Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent*, 11-15.
- 7 The urban population's rapid growth has been documented by the United Nations, which says that the number of people living in cities has skyrocketed from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion in 2018. In North America, 82 percent of the population lives in urban areas. For more information see "World Urbanization Prospects 2018," United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Highlights.pdf>.
- 8 Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent*, 11.
- 9 *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015), 2.

- 10 “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.
- 11 In the following discussion on sexuality, I am influenced by my doctoral supervisor Ken Magnuson. His discussion on sexual ethics can be found in Ken Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Academic, 2020), 147-169.
- 12 Gregg Allison, “Theological Anthropology” (Class lecture given at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., February 26, 2019).
- 13 Lewis B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), 32.
- 14 Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 21.
- 15 Peter Sprigg, “Opinion: Is Sexual Orientation Determined at Birth? No.,” *Newsday*, May 25, 2019, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.newsday.com/opinion/commentary/sexual-orientation-birth-gender-gay-straight-1.31463435>.
- 16 Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics*, 159.
- 17 Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics*, 159-160.
- 18 Scripture reserves sexual activity for a husband and wife who have covenanted together in marriage. Gregg Allison defines sexual activity as “any physical event or movement between people that is intended to arouse erotic desires and sensations for various purposes.” This definition comes from a course lecture given on February 26, 2019 by Gregg Allison, Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- 19 All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless indicated otherwise.
- 20 Magnuson develops this point further in Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics*, 178.

- 21 Gnosticism, beginning in the second century, was a complex heresy consisting of numerous movements, and it came to express itself in various ways throughout the ensuing centuries. A key teaching of Gnosticism is the notion that spiritual or immaterial realities are inherently good, while physical or material realities are inherently evil.
- 22 Gregg Allison, “Theological Anthropology” (Class lecture given at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., February 26, 2019).
- 23 While marriage points beyond itself to larger spiritual realities, marriage also serves a public good. Society depends on a steady birthrate and on a healthy environment in which children are born and nurtured. Ideally, this environment is marriage, where children are raised by a biological father and mother.
- Recent social science studies bear this out. For example, a household with married parents is more likely to have a wealthier, safer, and more educated home, as well as experience less teen pregnancy and abuse. Marriage increases a couple’s happiness, health, and faithfulness. Married couples are less likely to experience poverty than their single counterparts and are more likely to qualify for discounts or family rates on car, health, and homeowner’s insurance. Marriage is also beneficial for the children raised with two married parents. Children growing up with married parents have higher reading scores in kindergarten, behave better in school, and are more likely to graduate high school. Young adults raised with married parents are less sexually active in their teenage years, and young women have fewer sexual partners. Women raised in these families are less likely to become pregnant before marriage. Finally, children raised in married homes are less likely to be abused while those raised by unmarried parents are more likely to drink and drive and commit “violent and non-violent” crimes. This list could continue, but the inference is clear: marriage benefits couples, their children, and the rest of society. For more on the social good of marriage, see Pat Fagan, Anne Dougherty, and Miriam McElvain, “164 Reasons to Marry,” MARRI Research, January 2, 2014, <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF12A85.pdf>.
- 24 These six consequences are briefly discussed by Andreas Kostenberger in “The Bible’s Teaching on Marriage and the

Family,” Family Research Council, 2011, <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF11J34.pdf>, 8-11.

- 25 Beginning in the closing decades of the twentieth century, a systematic questioning of the church’s historic teaching on homosexual behavior took place within many Christian denominations. The term “revisionist” describes those who argue the Bible either does not outrightly condemn homosexuality or is at best ambiguous on its moral status. An early example is James B. Nelson’s *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (1978).
- 26 Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2015), 68. In another place, Vines argues that “no biblical writers suggested that the sin of Sodom was primarily or even partly engaging in same-sex behavior.” See Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 69.
- 27 Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2001), 80.
- 28 Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 69.
- 29 Sam Allberry, *Is God anti-gay?* (The Good Book Company, 2013), 28, emphasis original.
- 30 Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics*, 238.
- 31 Magnuson develops these points, and others, in greater detail. See Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics*, 238-241.
- 32 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 383.
- 33 Commenting on this connection, Sprinkle says, “This can’t be anything other than intentional. Paul pens Romans 1:23 with an eye on Genesis 1:26.” See Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015), 93.

- 34 Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 94–95.
- 35 Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 387.
- 36 See footnote 22 on page 405 of Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. Hays argues that Paul did not originate the application of the phrase *para physin* to homosexual behavior. Instead, he explains that its common appearance in the writings of Hellenistic moral philosophers is a “testimony to a convention that can be traced back at least as far as Plato, almost invariably in contexts where a negative judgment is pronounced on the morality or propriety of the ‘unnatural’ homosexual relations.”
- 37 Schreiner, *Romans*, 96.
- 38 There is debate within conservative theological circles regarding the moral status of same-sex attraction itself. Some, like Peter Abelard, argue that same-sex attraction—although a product of a fallen world—is not itself sinful. Abelard argues that same-sex attraction is a temptation that the human will can choose not to act or dwell on; it is the initiation of the will or “consent” either physically or mentally to an immoral desire that makes something a sin. See *Peter Abelard’s Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1971. Others, like Denny Burk, argue that same-sex attraction is itself sinful. See Denny Burk, “Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (JETS) 58/1 (2015): 95–115. For a summary of Burk’s argument, see: Denny Burk, “Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?” Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, February 18, 2014, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/is-homosexual-orientation-sinful/>.
- 39 Robert A. Gagnon has a lengthy treatment of the relevant terms found in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 in his book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, 303–336.
- 40 Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 382.

- 41 Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics*, 244.
- 42 Robert Gagnon concludes his exhaustive treatment of these terms, noting, “It is self-evident, then, that the combination of terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, are correctly understood in our contemporary context when they are applied to every conceivable type of same-sex intercourse.” See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, 330.
- 43 Preston Sprinkle makes the same point, when he writes, “Even if Jesus corrected (or improved upon) a few laws, he always makes this clear. That is, we have textual reasons, with chapters and verses, for saying that we should no longer poke out someone’s eye if they poke out ours. But when it comes to same-sex relations, there is nothing explicit nor implicit suggesting that Jesus corrected, improved upon, or did away with the sexual commands in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Nothing. There is no evidence.” See Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue*, 73.
- 44 Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics*, 250.
- 45 *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 590 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2020), [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618\\_hfci.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618_hfci.pdf).
- 46 J.K. Rowling, Twitter, June 6, 2020, [https://twitter.com/jk\\_rowling/status/1269389298664701952](https://twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1269389298664701952).
- 47 Ben Kessler, “Martina Navratilova Apologizes for Calling Trans Athletes ‘Cheats,’” NBC News, March 4, 2019, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/martina-navratilova-apologizes-calling-trans-athletes-cheats-n978971>.
- 48 Brianna Heldt, “Transgender Runners Cause Controversy After Winning Girls Track and Field Championships,” *Townhall*, March 5, 2019, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://townhall.com/tipsheet/briannaheldt/2019/03/05/transgender-runners-cause-controversy-n2542632>.

- 49 Alan Branch, *Affirming God's Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2019), 1.
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- 58 Augustine, *Marriage and Desire*, I, 10-11.

- 59 *Didache* 2.2. For an online, English translation of the *Didache*, see: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lake.html>.
- 60 *Epistle of Barnabas*, 19:4. See *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 148. The ANF translation reads: “Thou shalt not commit fornication: thou shalt not commit adultery: thou shalt not be a corrupter of youth.” In *The Apostolic Fathers: Early Christian Writings* (London: Penguin Books), 1968, Maxwell Staniforth translates the clause: “Commit no fornication, adultery, or unnatural vice.” The relevant Greek phrase is οὐ παιδοφθορήσεις which is the same phrase used in *Didache* 2.2. According to Peter Gentry, Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, οὐ παιδοφθορήσεις literally means “to corrupt boys.” Gentry argues Kirsopp Lake’s translation in the Loeb Classical Library, “commit sodomy” is correct. Robert Gagnon notes this line from *The Epistle of Barnabas* in his discussion of 1 Corinthians 6:9. See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, 320-321.
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- 65 See *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Schaff, 11:356-57.
- 66 Augustine, *Confessions*, 3:8:15, trans. Henry Chadwick, Oxford World’s Classics paperback (Oxford; N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1991), 46.

- 67 Ibid.
- 68 John Calvin, *Sermon on Ephesians* (Sermon on Ephesians 5:22-26, 31-33); quoted in John Witte and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage*, vol 1. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 484.
- 69 John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), 322.
- 70 *London Baptist Confession* (1689), Chapter 25, Article 1. Available online at <https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/chapter-25-marriage/>.
- 71 John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), 79. Likewise, in the following century, Matthew Henry (1662-1714), argued that the “unnatural lusts” of the men in Romans 1 were “against the plainest and most obvious dictates of natural light.” See Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), 1756.
- 72 John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), 209.
- 73 For an online version of the catechism, see: “The Catechism of the Council of Trent,” <http://www.saintsbooks.net/books/The%20Roman%20Catechism.pdf>. The “sins against chastity” are on p. 259.
- 74 The official position of the Roman Catholic Church on man and woman is articulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 1, Article 1, Line 369, it states: “Man and woman have been created, which is to say, willed by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. ‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator. Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity ‘in the image of

God'. In their 'being-man' and 'being-woman', they reflect the Creator's wisdom and goodness." See [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P1B.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P1B.HTM).

- 75 The Catholic Church's teaching of God's creation of the two sexes is further articulated in Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 1, Article 1, Line 372 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, where it states: "Man and woman were made 'for each other'-not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be "helpmate" to the other, for they are equal as persons ('bone of my bones. . .') and complementary as masculine and feminine. In marriage God unites them in such a way that, by forming 'one flesh', they can transmit human life: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.' By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents co-operate in a unique way in the Creator's work." See [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P1B.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P1B.HTM).
- 76 The official position of the Roman Catholic Church on marriage is restated in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter, "Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan," USCCB, November 17, 2009, <http://www.usccb.org/upload/marriage-love-life-divine-plan-2009.pdf>.
- 77 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knights, III. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 166.
- 78 For an overview of where the largest Christian denominations stand on same-sex marriage, see David Masci and Michael Lipka, "Where Christian churches, other religions stand on gay marriage," Pew Research Center, December 21, 2015, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/>.
- 79 The official position of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality is articulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 6, line 2357, it states: "Homosexuality refers to relations between men or

between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that ‘homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.’ They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.” See [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a6.htm](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a6.htm).

- 80 The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod’s official position is articulated on the denomination’s website. It reads: “God gave marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and His bride the Church (Eph. 5:32). Homosexual behavior is prohibited in the Old and New Testaments (Lev. 18:22, 24, 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9–20; 1 Tim. 1:10) as contrary to the Creator’s design (Rom. 1:26–27).” For full statement, see <https://www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/faqs/lcms-views#same-sex-marriage>.
- 81 The official position of the Presbyterian Church (PCA) is presented in The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America, chapter 59, subsection 3. See <https://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BCO-2019-with-bookmarks-for-website-1.pdf>.
- 82 Assemblies of God, “Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity (Adopted by the General Presbytery in Session August 4-5, 2014),” accessed March 20, 2020, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Homosexuality-Marriage-and-Sexual-Identity>.
- 83 The Southern Baptist Convention’s official position is captured in a series of resolutions approved by messengers at the annual Southern Baptist Convention. These include its “Resolution on Homosexuality,” (1988), “Resolution on Homosexual Marriage” (1996), “On Same-Sex Marriage” (2003), “On The California Supreme Court Decision To Allow Same-Sex Marriage” (2008), “On Protecting The Defense Of Marriage Act (DOMA)” (2011), and “On Transgender Identity” (2014).

- 84 Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, “SCOPA Statement on Moral Crisis in Our Nation,” August 13, 2003. For full statement, see <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/scoba/2003-08-13-moral-crisis>.
- 85 Mark Oppenheimer, “Now’s the Time To End Tax Exemptions for Religious Institutions,” *Time*, June 28, 2015, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://time.com/3939143/news-the-time-to-end-tax-exemptions-for-religious-institutions/>.
- 86 *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015).
- 87 U.S. Congress, House, *Equality Act*, HR 5, 116th Cong., 1st sess., introduced in House March 3, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5/text>.
- 88 For the full vote on the Equality Act, see <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2019/roll217.xml>.
- 89 “Sexual orientation and gender identity” is shortened to “SOGI” in the ordinances. These ordinances are laws that broadly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Often, SOGIs are used to coerce people to participate in an activity or speak a message that violates their religious beliefs.
- 90 Personal correspondence with Joanna Duka.



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