

**God Created Man and God Created Marriage:  
A White Paper by the Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary Faculty  
April 2015**

During the August 2014 meeting of the Baptist Missionary Association of America's (BMA) Coordinating Council, Dr. John Adams presented a report on behalf of the Moral Action Agency. The report included a sobering description of current trends that contradict biblical teaching on marriage. The council discussed the issue and requested that faculty of the BMA Seminary compose wording for a proposed amendment to the BMA Doctrinal Statement that articulated both scriptural teaching and the persistent belief of BMA churches regarding the institution of marriage. Following consultation with Moral Action's executive director, the seminary faculty adjusted a prior statement, Article IIIC, and prepared a new statement, Article IIID, for the council's consideration. Chairman Ed Stephenson, Pastor of the Springhill Baptist Church, Greenbrier, Arkansas, presented the statements to his church for approval. Subsequently, Springhill Baptist Church chose to recommend that the BMA adopt the statements during its annual 2015 meeting as an amendment to the association's Doctrinal Statement.

In addition to preparing recommended statements, the seminary faculty prepared a formal exposition of Article IIIC and Article IIID for the purpose of clarifying the intent of each statement for BMA leaders and laypersons. Article III of the BMA Doctrinal Statement rightly recognizes God as Creator of the world, angels, and man. The proposed changes to Section C attempt to update the article's language and affirm biblical teaching related to the origin of human life. The new statement, Section D, attempts to affirm biblical teaching that clearly establishes God's original and permanent intention for marriage to occur within the exclusive bounds of a monogamous heterosexual relationship. When taken as a whole, the BMA Doctrinal Statement reflects the inherent dignity of all individuals while addressing the realities and consequences of human depravity and the blessings of God's mercy and grace. Such a view undergirds the heart of this paper. The authors hope that readers will recognize marriage as a blessing from God, bound by His principles and purposes, to both the joy of individuals and honor to Him.

***Proposed Article III Section C: Man – As the crowning work of His creation, God created humankind (male and female) in His own image (Ps. 8; Gen. 1:27; 2:7). Consequently, every person from conception is of inherent dignity and worth and merits the respect of all other persons (Ps. 51:5; 139:13-16; Gen. 9:6; Matt. 10:28-31; James 3:9).***

*Human beings are the crowning work of God's creation (Ps. 8)*

A proper theological understanding of marriage necessitates a sound understanding of God's image. The revision of Article IIIC attempts to strengthen the current statement and support the new statement on marriage by providing greater clarity on the issue of "man" and God's image. Clarity in the revised statement begins with the addition of more up-to-date language employed to describe human beings. In the not-too-distant past individuals commonly used the term "man" to describe the entirety of humanity. The use of a masculine word to describe all of humanity, both men and women, was normative throughout English literature. Consequently "man" appears in many theological works, including historic confessions of faith. However, over the past five decades there has been a vast change in the way English speaking people use and understand gendered language. It is no longer common to use the masculine word

“man” to describe both men and women. Instead, writers and speakers now employ the use of words such as humanity, humans, human beings, and humankind. Some may decry such change as a consequence of a radical feminism that is unmoored from biblical concepts of womanhood. As a result some may wish to retain the former language, as a small linguistic protest of the changes the sexual revolution has unleashed on American and contemporary culture. Yet the BMA Doctrinal Statement is intended to communicate theological truth to all who read it. Hopefully, the use of current language addresses the truth with clarity and accuracy.

The assertion that human beings are the crowning work of God’s creation is essentially an expression of Psalm 8. David’s contemplation of the entirety of God’s creation, including the vastness of the heavenly bodies, drove him to the inescapable conclusion that humans are entirely unworthy of divine attention. In the vastness of God’s creative activity, humans are but specks on a small planet. Yet God created humans and crowned them with glory and honor. God created humans lower than Himself and the angels or heavenly beings, but created them greater than all the other created beings that inhabit the earth. Humans exist most definitely as earthly creatures with physical needs. Yet humans are also spiritual, designed to commune with God. In Psalm 8, David affirmed that it is the Lord who is majestic and glorious. David then used a similar word, also often translated glory, to describe what God has granted to each human. In this way, David indirectly reminds us that each person bears the image of God. This was not only a part of God’s original design, but has continued even after the entrance of sin into the world. The image of God now exists in a marred form, much like humans are only imperfectly able to exercise dominion over creation (Ps. 8:6-8; Gen. 1:28-30; 3:17-19).

*God created humankind (male and female) in His own image (Gen. 1:27; 2:7)*

Of all the creatures made by God, only humans are said to be made in the image of God. In Genesis 1:26, God said “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” The two words used, *tselem* (image) and *demut* (likeness), make clear that man is similar to God, but not the same as God. Genesis uses the same terms on a human level to describe Seth as being in the image and likeness of his father, Adam (Gen. 5:3). This similarity between parents and children is frequently obvious, both in appearance and behavior. However, the Bible is explicit that God is spirit. Therefore, the physical appearances of human bodies are not replicas of God. According to the Bible, a clear and vast difference exists between the all-powerful Creator and His creation, including humans even though they resemble God in certain respects. For example, Jesus Christ alone, not humans, reflects the exact image or the exact representation of God (Heb.1:3).

Genesis 1:27 asserts the seemingly simple concept that both men and women equally bear the image of God. However, our fallen and sinful world often ignores the reality that men and women are of equal worth and value. Yet there is something even more insightful in this verse. The image of God shows itself only partially in a man or all men collectively. Conversely, the image of God shows itself only partially in a woman or all women collectively. Men in their masculinity and women in their femininity are both reflective of their Creator. This is sometimes hard to grasp because of the masculine language most often used to describe God in the Bible. When God used language to reveal Himself, He chose masculine language (although some feminine analogies are interspersed throughout the Scriptures). Therefore, we tend to perceive God as male, although in reality God possesses no gender. Instead, the maleness and the femaleness of the human race reflect the diversity found in the Trinitarian Godhead. While men and women who join together in human community (civic, social, etc.) to some extent reflect the

unity found in the Godhead, these reflections of God's unity with diversity appear most evident within a marriage relationship and in a fellowship of Christian believers (i.e., *ekklesia* or church).

The complementary features of gender distinction, as described in Genesis 2:18 and expanded by Genesis 5:1, also reflect the image of God. In these passages, the importance of relational and gender diversity within a human pair bond<sup>1</sup> (i.e., marriage) is highlighted as a feature attracting the Designer's special creative interest. In all his uniqueness as a creature relating to God and reflecting the image of God, Adam, the first man, was identified as an incomplete and less-than-ideal creature, i.e. with a "not good" relational state (Gen. 2:18, 20). The Creator dealt with Adam's incompleteness by creating for him a single complement, the human female. Eve, a similar yet different person, reflected qualities that corresponded to Adam's and made him complete. Together, the male/female design most fully reflects the image of God (Gen. 5:1, 2) and provides the constituent elements necessary to procreate the image of God further in the persons of other human beings (Gen. 5:3). The result is that at conception, the fundamental blueprint for the image of God, in embryonic form, assimilates and reflects, even in its most basic state, the glory of the Creator.

*Consequently, every person from conception . . . (Ps. 51:5; 139:13-16)*

The Bible teaches clearly that a person's life begins in the womb. Biblical passages include both direct and implied references to the unborn as children filled with emotional capacity and called by God for specific purposes in life. For example, passages referring to the unborn fetus as a child include Genesis 25:22 and Exodus 21:22. In the Genesis passage, scripture speaks of the unborn twins, Jacob and Esau, as "children" or "sons." A literal translation of Exodus 21:22 implies personhood of the fetus born prematurely by reading it as "children come out." As a person with emotions, Luke 1:39-44 records that John the Baptist leaped with joy in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, over the presence of his relative Mary (and the newly conceived Jesus in her womb). Both Old and New Testament writers recognized the Lord's intimate association with the unborn child, or fetus (Job 10:8-12; 31:13-15; Gen. 25:22-23; Hosea 12:2-3; Matt. 1:18-21). God sometimes even prepared an unborn person for a specific calling or vocation. Examples include Jeremiah the prophet (Jer.1:5), Jacob and Esau (Rom. 9:11), and the Apostle Paul (Gal.1:15).<sup>2</sup>

The strongest evidences for possible personhood at the time of conception, two passages in the Psalter, must be read cautiously in light of their poetic literary contexts. First, Psalm 139:13-16 indicates that God had intimate knowledge of the Psalmist as an unformed embryo. Using the word picture of intricate weaving or knitting (v. 13; cf. Job 10:11), the Psalmist attested to Yahweh's intimate knowledge of his frame (as God formed his bones, v. 15) and his embryo (unformed substance, v. 16) long before it had reached maturity in the womb. This is consistent with a time at or close to conception of the fetus. Science indicates that "from the moment fertilization takes place, the child's genetic makeup is already complete. Its gender has already been determined, along with its height and hair, eye and skin color. The only thing the

---

<sup>1</sup> The phrase "pair bond" is intended to highlight the 1-to-1 relational nature of marriage, i.e. "pair," which inherently precludes multiple partners, such as in polygamy or polyamory. Additionally, it assumes that the two individuals involved are sexually mature adults, precluding the participation of 1 or more non-adults in marriage, where "adult" requires at least sexual and cognitive maturity.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. <http://christiananswers.net/q-aig/aig-bibleandabortion.html>

embryo needs to become a fully-functioning being is the time to grow and develop."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Psalm 139:16b mentions God's foreknowledge of the days which He ordained for the Psalmist, certainly emphasizing personhood of the fetus. Also, because the primary context of Psalm 139 is that of worship and thanksgiving to God (v. 14), this passage has tremendous theological significance. For example, the passage affirms confidence in God's sovereignty over a fetus in the womb. Although the term "conception" does not appear in the text, the scripture's teaching about fetus and embryo from the beginning stages is consistent with the idea of life beginning at conception and speaks unequivocally of life in the womb.

Second, Psalm 51:5<sup>4</sup>, seventh verse in the Hebrew text, may indicate sinfulness at conception which would imply personhood. For example, Keil and Delitzsch concluded that "David here confesses his hereditary sin as the root of his actual sin. The declaration moves backwards from his birth to conception, it consequently penetrates even to the most remote point of life's beginning."<sup>5</sup> Yet in honesty one must cautiously interpret David's passionate words; the context is not a theological lecture but his calling out to God for forgiveness due to his adultery with Bathsheba and his causing the death of her husband, Uriah. One must not over-read doctrine into such poetic passages, which—not being primarily doctrinal repositories—often use figures of speech (word pictures) to enable the reader to share the emotions and intense feelings of the author.<sup>6</sup> "The psalmist has probably employed hyperbole — purposeful exaggeration— in order to express strongly and vividly that he is a sinner, with a long history of such."<sup>7</sup> Although God is righteous and desired truth in David's inward parts (Ps. 51:6), David's statement in Psalm 51:5 "concedes that his sin proceeds from a longstanding sinful nature. Rather than a clear articulation of the theological principle of 'original sin' (though not incompatible with such a view), he recognizes that sin has had long-term and far-reaching influence in his life."<sup>8</sup>

In conclusion, the Scriptures certainly teach life begins in the womb (as an embryo-- perhaps at the time of conception as found in Ps.139:13-16). As stated earlier, biblical passages include both direct and implied references to the unborn as children filled with emotional capacity and called by God for specific purposes in life. Psalm 51:5 may also support this by acknowledging the inherent sinfulness of David at conception although the passage's primary purpose is not a theological statement. Such passages clearly demonstrate the presence of life and personhood in the womb from the earliest of stages.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gotquestions.org/life-begin-conception.html#ixzz3O74t7SWu>

<sup>4</sup>The actual numbering of verses differs between English versions and the Hebrew text. The English version of Psalm 51 appears as the seventh verse in the Hebrew text. This paper references numbering assigned in the English versions while acknowledging the differing Hebrew text.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 367.

<sup>6</sup> Poetry does not necessarily teach theology. A psalm (as a musical poem) cannot be read in exactly the same way as an epistle or a section of law which purposefully intends to teach. See Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*: 4th ed. Zondervan, 215.

<sup>7</sup> Fee and Stuart, 215.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1* (The NIV Application Commentary) (Kindle Locations 16423-16428). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

*Every person . . . is of inherent dignity and worth and merits the respect of all other persons (Gen. 9:6; Matt. 10:28-31; James 3:9).*

Being made in God's image necessitates *inherent dignity and worth and merits the respect of all other persons*. The key biblical passage speaking to the uniqueness of human beings is found in Genesis 1:26-27, which locates their inherent dignity and worth in their design pattern. The structure of the text suggests that humans possess unique characteristics mirroring God's characteristics in such a way and to the extent that humans are themselves sacred, though on a finite or limited scale. In effect, this design makes them as much like God as possible for created beings. Further, the presence of this design pattern, although marred by the effects of sin in Genesis 3, prevails even in sinful humans so that to murder a human warrants the most exacting penalty as identified by the key biblical passage prohibiting murder (Gen. 9:6). This uniqueness also serves as the basis for why humans ought not to even desecrate others by profane speech (James 3:9). The truth that God creates each human being in His image ensures the inherent worth of each person and necessitates that all other persons respect him or her. Genuine respect for others should always demonstrate God's mercy and obedience to Christ's teachings of how to treat those with whom one disagrees (Luke 6:27-38).

**Article III Section D. *God created marriage (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:23-24). Jesus Christ declared the Creator's intention for marriage to be the inseparable and exclusive union between a male and a female (i.e. a natural man and a natural woman) (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Rom. 1:25-27). Marriage testifies of the union between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32).***

*God created marriage (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:23-24).*

Psalm 24:1-2 teaches that everything and everyone belongs to God because He created them. Creating all things automatically establishes God's ownership of what He created and affirms the reality that all of creation, including human beings, must submit to His authority. When asked by the Pharisees to explain the legalities of marital longevity, Jesus recognized their efforts to tempt Him (Matt. 19:3-12). At the time, varied opinions of marriage existed. In response, Jesus went directly to the original intent of marriage as recorded in scripture. The Lord asked the Pharisees a question that clearly demonstrated His belief in creation, in a Creator, and in the Genesis account of creation found in the Bible, "Have ye not **read**, that he which **made them** at the **beginning** made them male and female. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Matt. 19:4-5). In this passage, Jesus referred to Genesis 2:23 and quoted from Genesis 2:24. Because God created both humans and marriage, humans must recognize themselves as accountable to His intent for marriage.

Genesis 2:24-25 identifies the special and exclusive relationship of the adult human male and female, joined together as husband and wife (Gen. 2:24, 25), as the most fundamental and basic human relationship. This relationship is said to have been designed directly by God and serves as the sole basis for a distinct family unit in perpetuity (Gen. 2:24, 25; 4:1, 17) and is even intended to be interminable except under specific, extreme circumstances (Matt. 19:8). These passages declare that God's reason for creating male and female finds its ultimate purpose in the ability of male and female to become one flesh. The concept of one flesh includes physical (i.e., sexual), spiritual, mental, and emotional components.<sup>9</sup> While some may argue for the possibility

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert Bergen, "Genesis" in *Holman Christian Study Bible*, ed. Jeremy R. Howard (Nashville: Holman, 2010), 12.

of such oneness outside the bounds of the monogamous heterosexual union, such arguments simply lack legitimate support from the Bible.

*The inseparable and exclusive union (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9)*

According to the proposed amendment to the BMAA Doctrinal Statement (Article III, Section D.), *Jesus Christ declared the Creator's intention for marriage to be the **inseparable and exclusive** union between a male and female* (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Rom. 1:25-27). Both Matthew and Mark record a response by Jesus to the Pharisees regarding a question concerning a man divorcing his wife. In his answer, Jesus describes God's original intention for the marriage relationship and speaks to the permanent and inseparable union of the marital bond. Jesus, quoting from Genesis 2:24, says that a man is to cleave unto his wife. The word cleave means "to join closely together, to unite" and in the passive sense (as used in Matthew and Mark), it means to "cling." Mark's account uses a slight variation of the word that means "to glue on, to be stuck to, to stick or cleave to." In the figurative sense, it means "to adhere closely to, to be faithfully devoted to, to be joined to."<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew word found in Genesis 2:24 carries the connotation of clinging or cleaving in the sense of loyalty and affection.<sup>11</sup> Jesus, therefore, states that when a man enters into a marriage relationship with a woman, he is to continue in that relationship and be loyal to his wife. The result of entering into such a relationship is that the two become one flesh; that is, one in their physical relationship and faithfulness to one another.<sup>12</sup>

A second part of Jesus' response is in relation to God's sanction of the marital relationship. Jesus, in Matthew 19:6, refers to "What . . . God has joined together . . ." The Greek word translated "joined together" literally means *yoked together* and was used of yoking animals together (cf. Luke 14:19 where the noun form of the same Greek word is used of a yoke/pair of oxen). God brings a man and a woman together in marriage so that they might work together as one. Jesus further states that whatever God has joined together, "let no man separate." The word *separate* means "to divide or sever."<sup>13</sup> This word is used with a negative particle written as a negative command to be defined as a general prohibition to be enforced.<sup>14</sup> This same word is used in Romans 8:35, 39 as a question, "Who can separate us from the love of Christ and of God?" The obvious answer here is that no one or nothing can separate or sever one from God's love. With the use of the negative command in Matthew 19:6, therefore, Jesus is saying that no one should separate or sever what God has joined together in the marriage relationship between a man and a woman.

Not only is the marriage relationship an inseparable union, but it is an exclusive union between a male and female (i.e., heterosexual and monogamous). Of the several possible definitions of "exclusive," the one that best fits this usage is "ruling out or removing from

---

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 179.

<sup>12</sup> According to the NIDNTT, "marriage is indissoluble, because in it two persons become one living being. This refers to the relationship of the partners and not merely the sexual union." Brown, Colin, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Vol. 2, Translated with additions and revisions from the German Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 349.

<sup>13</sup> George V Wigram. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 441. Originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, London, 1852.

<sup>14</sup> Rogers and Rogers, 42.

consideration any and all items or ideas other than what is specifically named.”<sup>15</sup> An “exclusive union between a male and a female,” in this application, rules out any other kind of union. The fact that God created humankind as male and female and told them to populate the earth (Gen. 1:27-28 – “So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth . . .”) suggests that His purpose for making them male and female was so that they could reproduce. This is the reasoning behind Genesis 2:24 – “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

*Creator’s intention for marriage . . . between a male and a female (Rom. 1:25-27)*

The principle of sexual complementarity—that male and female were designed for each other—pervades God's design for marriage. Jesus appealed directly to that design in Matthew 19:4-6, where he quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as part of his response to a question about divorce. God made humankind male and female. Further, he made Eve to be a complement to Adam—together they make complete humanity in God's image (see Section III.C.). Jesus is making the point that God created man and woman as a complementary pair, to be in a relationship of intimate, lifelong covenant commitment. This pattern of marriage is assumed throughout the biblical story.

On the other hand, same-sex eroticism is forbidden in the Old and New Testaments. While the number of passages that deal specifically with homosexual practice is quite small, those that definitely address it are clear in their meaning.<sup>16</sup> In God's covenant with Israel, God specifically prohibits sexual activity between men (Lev. 18:22; 20:13) and calls it an abomination (cf. Ezek. 16:50).<sup>17</sup> While there is no parallel prohibition for women in the OT, it is apparent that the Lord also considered this behavior equally sinful in view of the fact that the NT does contain such a judgment explicitly for both women (Rom. 1:26) and men (Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). It is especially notable that in Romans 1:26-27 Paul judges homosexual practice to be “contrary to nature,” appealing as Jesus did to the created order of male and female as the proper sphere for human sexual activity and ruling out homosexual practice because it is contrary to that design.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> This definition of “exclusive” is an amalgamation of information from a number of online dictionaries.

<sup>16</sup> Noticeably absent from this paragraph is any discussion of Gen. 19 and the destruction of Sodom. While it is clear that homosexual lust was one of the sins of Sodom, it is not clear that this was the main reason for its destruction. See the thorough discussion of this question in chapter 3 of the forthcoming (2016), yet-untitled book on homosexuality by Preston Sprinkle. In short, there is ample OT witness to the impropriety of homosexual eroticism without appealing to Genesis 19 as a key text. Ezekiel 16:49, 50 provide the complete list of sins concerning Sodom.

<sup>17</sup> James Hamilton, following Robert Gagnon, points out that the word for “abomination” in Ezek. 16:50, referring back to the sins of Sodom, is the singular of *toevah*, which occurs in the OT only two other times—in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 to describe homosexual intercourse. See Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 79–85, cited in James M. Hamilton, Jr., “How to Condone What the Bible Condemns: Matthew Vines Takes on the Old Testament,” in *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines*, ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2014), 35.

<sup>18</sup> For an effective summary of differing views of Paul's teaching here, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 92-97. For broader

So when Jesus appeals to the original, gendered design of the human race in Matthew 19, one can safely conclude that he is doing so in continuity with how that design is worked out in the Old Testament as a whole. Taken together with relevant texts from the Pauline epistles, it is reasonable to conclude that even now in the New Covenant era God intends marriage to be between—not just two humans—but two *sexually complementary* humans—a male and a female, and that same-sex sexual activity is still forbidden. This excludes the possibility of homosexual marriage.<sup>19</sup>

*The Creator's intention for marriage to be . . . between . . . (i.e., a natural man and a natural woman)*

A marriage is to be comprised of a biological (i.e., "natural") man and woman. Because of the brokenness of creation as a whole, and the human race in particular, humans made in God's image sometimes face difficult disorders of sexuality which call for great compassion and sensitivity among God's people. First, there are some who perceive themselves to be the opposite *gender* in spite of their physical *sexual* characteristics (i.e., a biological male identifies psychologically as a woman, or vice versa). As noted above and in Section III.C., God has designed the human race to be male and female, and he has prohibited same-sex sexual behavior. Accordingly, Scripture does not make possible the separation of sex and gender as the transgender movement has done. One who is biologically male must strive, by God's redeeming and sanctifying grace, to live as a man, and likewise one who is biologically female must strive to live as a woman—hence the language "a natural man and a natural woman" in the doctrinal statement proposal.

Second, a small percentage of people are born with ambiguous sexual attributes (now typically called "intersex" instead of the older term "hermaphrodite"). Intersex disorders occur on a spectrum and are not always easily resolved through medical analysis. People in this condition are nevertheless made in God's image and must be cherished accordingly. Above all, they may be in need of extra understanding, patience, and love from God's people as they work through the medical, relational, emotional, and spiritual issues associated with their condition.

It is not the purpose of this paper to address these complex issues in detail, yet it is important to acknowledge their reality and relevance to the discussion at hand—specifically, that while God intends marriage to be only between a man and a woman, the church must be prepared to help people who through circumstances beyond their control have difficulty determining whether they are male or female.<sup>20</sup>

*Marriage testifies of the union between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32)*

Throughout the Scriptures marriage serves as an illustration of the relationship between God and His covenant people. One will not find this relationship explicitly declared prior to the

---

discussion of the NT texts mentioned here, see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 303ff; and Sprinkle, forthcoming, chapter 7.

<sup>19</sup> Note that this discussion only covers the practice of same-sex sexual activity and does not address the issue of same-sex attraction (or same-sex orientation). For helpful practical discussion of this question see Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); and Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?* (n.p.: The Good Book Company, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, evangelical resources on intersex and transgenderism are quite sparse.

writings of the prophets, but the clues appear early in the scriptures.<sup>21</sup> In Exodus 34:15 and Leviticus 17:7 God warns the people not to “whore after” the false gods of the nations,<sup>22</sup> thus implying that for Israel to worship the one true God alone is like clinging faithfully to one’s spouse. The prophets more explicitly use the image of God as husband and Israel as wife to extol God’s covenant faithfulness toward Israel (Ezek. 16:8), but it is always in the context of Israel’s covenant faithlessness (Ezek. 16:15).

While the Old Testament prophets use this image to extol God’s covenant faithfulness toward Israel (Ezek. 16:8), it is always in the context of Israel’s covenant faithlessness (Ezek. 16:15). God stands as the faithful husband who has done everything to protect his wife and to provide her with all she needs to flourish, but Israel behaves like the wandering adulterous woman who goes seeking other lovers, giving her body to other men and seeking their protection and luxurious gifts. Israel did this by seeking prosperity and protection from foreign nations, by adopting their gods and worship practices, and by intermarrying with them. Even after all her adultery, God continues to be faithful to His covenant (Hosea 2:14-15).

This concept takes on new life with the revelation of Jesus Christ and the eternal purpose of God in redemption throughout the New Testament, where it is also unveiled that God’s people are a bride in preparation for Christ, her husband. In Ephesians 5:31-32, Paul presents the relationship between Christ and the church as the divine reality to which the institution of marriage points.

In verses 22-30, Paul develops the idea that God has called wives and husbands to relate to their spouses as Christ and the church relate to one another. Wives are to submit to their husbands with the love and joy with which the church submits to Christ. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Furthermore, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies, for this is the example of Christ, who nourishes and cherishes his body, the church.

Thus far, Paul is employing an analogy. Wives are to husbands as the church is to Christ, and vice versa. In verse 31 Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, God’s institution of marriage at the creation of humankind. He does this to remind readers that husband and wife really are one flesh and one body. However, Paul recognizes the institution of marriage from Genesis 2:24, not only to show that husband and wife are one flesh, but also to show that Christ and the church are one flesh, and he moves from mere analogy to theological revelation.<sup>23</sup>

In verses 31-32 Paul claims that, in speaking the words of Genesis 2:24, he is talking about Christ and the church, and he calls this fact a “great mystery.”<sup>24</sup> His quotation of Genesis 2:24 begins with “for this cause,” or “therefore.” Paul does not use these words simply because they are in Genesis 2:24, but in order to unveil the surprising idea that the real reason that a man leaves his father and mother and becomes one flesh with his wife is that “we are members of his body,” that is, the church is one flesh with Christ. Paul indicates that marriage, being much more than a convenient illustration, exists in order to show and proclaim the relationship between

---

<sup>21</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, *Whoredom: God’s Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Thomas. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 432.

<sup>24</sup> Frank. Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010), 389.

Christ and the church.<sup>25</sup> One scholar says that, in effect, Paul is saying, “The mystery I am about to describe is especially mysterious, but I am going to say it anyway: when I refer to the well-known establishment of marriage in the book of Genesis, I am talking about Christ and the church.”<sup>26</sup>

What emerges is a “typology that serves Paul’s pastoral purpose of providing a model for Christian marriage which is grounded in primeval human origins and reflective of ultimate divine reality.”<sup>27</sup> God instituted marriage between man and woman in anticipation of Christ’s union with the church, just as he instituted the sacrificial system to typify the work of Christ as the great high priest and sacrificial offering. The sacrificial system had an immediate purpose in the life of ancient Israel, but would be a fleeting shadow in the full light of the Gospel. In the same way, marriage has immediate purpose to serve as a foundation for the family and human society. However, marriage is a mere shadow cast in this world by an immense reality in the next, where the everlasting communion of Christ and the church is the real thing to which marriage points.

Paul is digressing; in the course of giving practical instruction for godly family living, he has begun to exult in the glories of the Gospel. He indicates this in verse 33 when he returns from his digression and says, “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.” The word translated here as “nevertheless,” is a word Paul uses often to break off from a digression and return to the topic at hand.<sup>28</sup> One might imagine him finishing verse 32 with a faraway look in his eye, and returning to the subject of husbands and wives abruptly, but somewhat reluctantly.<sup>29</sup>

Paul’s mystery is not like the obscured mysteries of certain false teachers, for it is revealed in Christ and has a serious impact on Christian life and doctrine. In chapter 3 Paul revealed that the salvation of the gentiles and their unification with the Jews in Christ was a mystery that has now been revealed to “his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” This revelation had a significant impact upon the nature of the church, which is thus a body of redeemed souls from every tribe and tongue and nation and language. Each of these mysteries now revealed becomes a part of the whole counsel God. Thus, the ultimate purpose of marriage as an image of the eternal communion of Christ and the church must be considered when defining marriage and establishing a doctrine of marriage and human sexuality.

There are many reasons why a redefinition of marriage to include unions between same-sex individuals is unscriptural, but the one which emerges in light of Paul’s revelation in Ephesians 5:31-32 is that marriage between a man and a woman is a testimony of an eternal divine reality. Nowhere in Holy Scripture is it suggested that a marital union of two people of the same sex is typological of the union of Christ and the church. In fact, homosexual behavior, among other sexual perversions, is presented as the direct result of idolatry, an idea which is well-represented in ancient Jewish literature.<sup>30</sup> In Romans 1:22-27 Paul asserts that men

---

<sup>25</sup> Ortlund, *Whoredom*, 156

<sup>26</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 390.

<sup>27</sup> O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 433.

<sup>28</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 390.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 93-94 ; Douglas J. Moo, *Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 108-109 ; Charles H. Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2002),

“exchanged the truth of God for a lie.” In so doing, they fashioned idols resembling human beings and animals. This exchange resulted in God handing humankind over to “vile affections,” which included homosexual behavior.

Paul asserts a causal relationship between idolatry and sexual sin.<sup>31</sup> He portrays it as a destructive spiral in which man’s descent into sin mirrors his descent into idolatry. Man’s rejection of truths about God leads to worship of false images of God. The fact that Paul mentions “images like unto man” first is perhaps significant. Corruption of the truth about God led people to worship idols which resembled humankind. Man’s descent from worshiping the true God to worshiping images of human beings is a tremendous failure, one marked by God handing man over to dishonorable passions, homosexuality in particular. Sexual behavior between persons of the same sex is a reflection of idolatry, in which the worshipping human prefers the attributes of man to the attributes of God. Paul highlights homosexual behavior, not necessarily because it is a more grievous sin than any other, but because it best illustrates idolatry.<sup>32</sup> Whereas God instituted marriage to testify of the union of Christ and the church, Paul asserts here that God handed humanity over to a specific manifestation of sin in order to testify of the heinous nature of idolatry. Both idolatry and homosexuality turn the created order upside-down.<sup>33</sup>

This is not to say that all homosexuals are homosexual because they, as individuals, are idolaters. Paul’s assertion is that humanity’s corporate descent into sin mirrors its corporate descent into theological corruption. It would be a grievous error to single out homosexuals for discrimination or ill treatment as a response to this passage, for Paul goes on to describe the full descent of man into all forms of unrighteousness. He lists more than twenty types of sin for which all kinds of people are guilty and stand condemned. He lists many of these same sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 when he says:

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind<sup>34</sup>, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

Paul acknowledges that, among faithful Christians there are those who were guilty of these sins, but whom God has cleansed, saying in verse 11: “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

Thus, to single out any particular kind of sinner for ill treatment or special condemnation is a denial of the true nature of God’s grace toward sinners and the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings. In fact, it is in the lives of homosexuals and transgendered individuals that the glories of the Gospel are uniquely manifested when God grants them faith leading to repentance,

---

65; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press, 1988), 89.

<sup>31</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 92-93.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>34</sup>The Greek word translated “effeminate” and the Greek word translated “abusers of themselves with mankind,” refer to both positions in a homosexual relationship. They refer to the passive “receiving” participant and the active “giving” participant, respectively.

just as God's glory is uniquely manifested when murderers, thieves, adulterers, or even disobedient little children repent and believe the Gospel. Jesus Christ was crucified so that sinners can be presented to Christ, together with the rest of the church, as a holy bride without spot or blemish.

Although a biblical marriage is one consisting of a naturally born man and a naturally born woman, the Bible does not declare that a person must be married in order to please God or to live a full life, or even to be happy. In fact, God is especially pleased to honor the childless<sup>35</sup>, the eunuchs<sup>36</sup>, and the celibate<sup>37</sup> who choose those things that please Him and who keep his word. All people, no matter their temptations, are called to reject sin in all its forms with God's help, living humble and holy lives as they wait for the return of the Lord Jesus and the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Prepared by BMA Seminary Faculty:

Dr. Philip Attebery

Dr. David Erickson

Jacob Gucker

Dr. David Hellwig

Dr. Charley Holmes

Dr. Ronnie Johnson

Dr. Greg Parsons

R. Brian Rickett

Dr. James Shine

Dr. Andy Snider

---

<sup>35</sup> Isaiah 54:1. Psalm 113:9.

<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 56:4-5. "For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:32. Although not limited to those who practice celibacy, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 verifies abstinence from sexual immorality as essential to keeping God's will, the ability for individuals to control their passions in honorably, warning of punishment, a call to purity, and that rejecting such instruction is a rejection of God not man.