

A Word to Sheepdogs

SEX HAS FALLEN ON HARD TIMES in the West; seeking more and more unencumbered indulgence, humanity is discovering that “free sex” comes with a very high price tag in terms of fractured families, aborted babies, tortured souls and seared, burdened consciences.

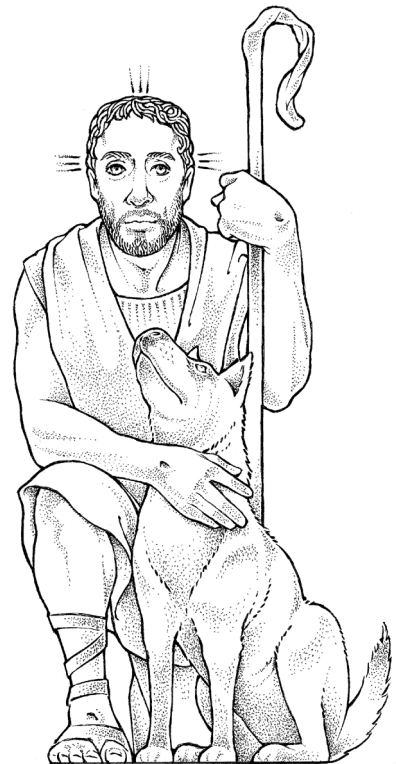
We all rightly deplore the ongoing precipitous slide of our sex-crazed culture into moral oblivion and social decay. Yet we tend to hang back and wring our hands helplessly. It's the contemporary parallel to a 19th century adage attributed to Mark Twain: “Everybody complains about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.”

In this important essay, Lucas Woodford helps us to do more than complain about our cultural cesspool; he actually provides us with practical tools to begin to address this situation constructively and intelligently within our parishes and households.

Dr. Woodford is the president of the Minnesota South District of the LCMS and a DOXOLOGY Collegium Fellow. In this captivating contribution he demonstrates that ecclesial supervisors are also bishops and pastors. At every turn his pastoral heart is showing, demonstrating how both parents and pastors can actually care for the little ones entrusted to them confidently and positively.

Candid and practical, blunt and personal, in this essay Pastor Woodford speaks from his own experience as a husband, father, and pastor. He speaks with passionate compassion and informed insight. He shows that, in our sexual crisis, what's at stake is not just a set of moral values; this is a moment of public confession for the church. This is our collective opportunity as Christians to robustly and joyfully confess and demonstrate to a fractured world an embodied faith in Christ Jesus, the light no darkness can overcome.

Dr. H. L. Senkbeil



Reclaiming Family and Sexual Virtue in Congregation and School

Pastor Lucas V. Woodford

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish... "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church (Eph 5:22-33).

Introduction

IF WE THINK OF THE SEXUAL CHAOS of our culture as just an ethical crisis, we're missing a significant opportunity. In the present situation, we are called not merely to tackle a sexual quagmire, but to confess Christ. Because the prevailing worldview increasingly insists on regarding the human body as an expression of the self, the doctrines of creation, redemption, and sanctification are all on the line.

Because the Christian life is an embodied life, this is actually a moment of public confession for the church. God the Father made man and woman in his own image and likeness and brought them together in holy matrimony. God the Son took on male infant flesh to ransom all mankind out from under sin, death, and hell. God the Spirit sanctifies the baptized to live an embod-

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ied life of righteousness, holiness, and blessedness.

This means what the church has to say about sex and marriage is important not merely for ethical guidance. It belongs to our common confession of the faith at this moment in history. As we teach and encourage sexual chastity and fidelity, we are telling the eternal story of God's love in action as it is to be preached in our pulpits, taught in our classrooms, and embodied day by day in Christian households before a watching world.

The truth is, God created sex in the first place and then used procreation for our redemption. This is our story — yours and mine. This is our story here and now because it was first of all God's story when the world was young, a story recapitulated when his Son took on human flesh to claim his earthly bride, the church. The Bible begins and ends with two weddings: the wedding of Adam and Eve in Eden and the wedding of Christ and his church in eternal glory.

Thus, Paul's words to the Ephesians above set forth something profound. He does not use marriage simply as a metaphor to help us understand the gospel. Rather, it is the other way around. He uses the gospel to clarify marriage: God has in fact designed the one-flesh union of marriage as a fixed likeness (or an embodied image) of the union between Christ and his church. Marriage and sexuality are among the most powerful pulls in human experience. And from a Scriptural perspective, they are designed to train humanity to recognize, here in time and there in eternity, what it means for Jesus to be one with his church.

There's a reason why humans don't split apart like amoebas. We were

all conceived in the union between a man and a woman. But beyond this natural reality, the gospel tells us there's a cosmic mystery to our existence (Eph 5:32). As we live out our lives here on this earth, the gospel truth is what upholds and supports our existence as males and females, as husbands and wives, as fathers and mothers. This foundational truth must uphold and sustain any endeavor to reclaim the goodness of family and sexual virtue in our society, particularly in our congregations and schools.

That's the goal of this essay. Rooted in this truth, and based on years of first-hand experience with my own congregation and parochial school, and coupled with speaking about this around the country, this paper will provide a framework for pastors and teachers, congregations and schools, parents and grandparents to address the profound moral revolution of our time with biblical confidence and intentionality. The denigration of sexuality and marriage has distorted and reduced the one flesh union into perverse erotic personal gratification, pulled it apart from the blessing of child bearing, completely redefined marriage in the name of civil rights, and asserted that gender is merely a malleable social construct rooted in feelings rather than objective biological realities.

In short, we are living at a time when people have lost their story. Many are asking, "*Who am I?*" Many don't even have a sense of the world's story. *What's it all about? Where do I come from? Where am I going? How do I make sense of the world in which I live?* In other words, they're without a story. They're without an identity. And this is especially distressing when it comes to under-

standing one's place in life, in marriage, in a family, and in eternity, not to mention how it shapes one's view of sexuality, manhood, and womanhood.

When someone doesn't know their story — who they are, where they come from, and where they're going, the world becomes a confusing place. Satan's lies become hard to resist. Simply consider the example of Bruce Jenner, who now goes by the name Caitlyn Jenner. A former national elite athlete and Olympian, he became confused about his identity and uncertain about his purpose. Thinking he was a woman in a man's body, he "transitioned" or surgically altered (mutilated) his body to look like a woman. Sadly, rather than helping such tortured souls amid their misbeliefs and great dysfunction, our society puts them on the cover of a magazine, and in this case, gave Bruce (or "Caitlyn") the 2015 Arthur Ashe Courage ESPY award for being an outspoken transgender person.

Likewise, consider how the Supreme Court of the United States in the 2015 case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruled by a slim majority that the constitution somehow guarantees the right of homosexual couples to marry and be considered the legal equivalent of heterosexual couples who marry. As a result, marriage has been completely redefined and a virtual Pandora's box has been opened to mold marriage into whatever is the popular trend of the day — soon likely to include throuples, multiple partners, and even pedophile and incestual relationships.

Pastors, parents, grandparents and teachers need to know how to objectively, intentionally, and yet compassionately teach the truth of God's word in the face of a society that is

trying to normalize deviant behavior and marital misbeliefs. We need to be able to boldly believe and teach that God created us with distinct and unique human bodies — which includes our unalterable and surgery-proof DNA; that God made us "male and female," where our chromosomes reflect the beautiful complexity and permanently sexed traits of our physical bodies. We need to be able to confidently and boldly teach that males are males, and females are females; that they are not interchangeable nor mere social constructs. But in fact they are specific creations, with transcendent differences. We need to confidently teach the God-created design of a one-man, one-woman marriage and the wonderful joys and purposes of that one flesh union in the creation of children.

As the confusion grows around us, faithful Christians must be intentional about teaching our children what marriage is, what family is, what it means to be a godly woman, a godly wife, and a godly mother, as well as what it means to be a godly man, a godly husband, and a godly father.

What is more, we must be positive and winsome in our witness. In an age of hyper partisan politics, intolerance, and critical name calling, it is vitally important for Christian congregations, schools, and families to stand passionately *for* something, not simply against something. Sometimes the church falls into the habit of only pointing out the negative things of our culture by repeatedly stating what we are against (where we proceed to name each sin over and over again). True and important as this may be, it is not always helpful toward building positive momentum to reclaim family and sexual virtue.

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Even while we examine the negative realities of the sin in our culture, overall our teaching must be a clarion call to the good, the true, and the beautiful — the biblical vision of sex and marriage in both God's first creation and in his new creation.

After all, the church is a story bound people full of the good news of Jesus Christ. We want to tell the world this good news, and what it means to live as a family, in his grace, with his love, here and now at this time, and in all eternity. The best place to start, of course, is in our own families, in our congregations, and in our parochial schools. From generation to generation the church stands upon the truth of Jesus Christ and his shed blood for us. We courageously proclaim the beauty and the grandeur of his plan of salvation. Our witness regarding sex and marriage in these chaotic and confusing times is rooted in the incredible love story of how God has adorned his church to be the bride of Christ.

There are several mileposts in the journey toward reclaiming a marriage culture in the church in our time, it seems to me. First we will look at the divine design and vocation of human beings, sexuality and the family, along with the good the family is for society. Then we will consider the loss of sexual virtue (and virtue itself) and what it means and looks like to reclaim that among our families and congregations and schools. We will have a brief look at the impact of contraceptives, as well as the devastating impact of pornography — all with the light of Christ leading us confidently forward so as not to lose hope in a dark world. Finally, I will supply some appendices with specific steps, resources, and frameworks that could be used by

families, congregations, and schools as components in an intentional process for reclaiming the goodness of family and sexual virtue.

The Hard Work of Raising a Family

Having a family is hard work. Let's be honest. Being a parent is hard work. Anyone who is a parent knows that it is a thankless job, and relentlessly demanding. But the rewards of it go beyond the personal. Families have tremendous benefits for both society and church. Families produce productive citizens who pay taxes and contribute to the common good. Families produce baptized children who grow in the faith, serve their neighbor, witness in their vocations, and pass on the faith to their children. Sadly, building the traditional family is becoming a lost art. Perhaps, at least in part, that's because it's hard to raise a family.

As Robert Capon has said, "It's hard to make a home. It's hard to raise a family — hard to manage the intractable results of bed and board without doing irreparable damage to somebody."¹ Yes, our sinful nature makes raising a family tough enough, but now we live in a society that has, in many respects, become hostile to traditional family.

However, the gospel fortifies our resolve. It proclaims the life that men, women, and children — that all families — have in Christ. As Paul proclaimed, "*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, with-*

¹ Robert Capon. *Bed and Board: Plain Talk About Marriage*, (2018). p. 12.

out spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Eph 5:25-27)

Christ adorns his bride, washes her clean, and gives life to her so that we can, with a good conscience, for the good of all, live out our God-created earthly vocations. It’s what the Small Catechism describes in The Table of Duties as the people of God go about being males, husbands, fathers, females, wives, mothers, children, Christians, and workers.

Part of reclaiming the goodness of family is for the church to intentionally and regularly lift up the vocations of men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and celebrate the incredible blessings that they are. These vocations are at the core of the family, and at the core of the church. Thus, we must be able to answer the questions of, “What does it mean to be a godly woman and godly man? What does it mean to be a Christian parent? How do I teach this to my children? How do I not only *inform* them, but *form* them to be a man and a woman of God?”

The Story of Creation—A Narrative of Life

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.” (Gen 1:1-3)

In the beginning we see and hear the triune God busily at work, creating the heavens and the earth. God the Father is there, God the Holy Spirit is there, and God the Son is there in his pre-incarnate form, coming forth from the Father’s mouth and speak-

ing creation into existence. The first thing that the Word creates out of the void is “light.” No small detail, for Jesus Christ himself is the light of world. These grey and latter days have met their match. Jesus gives us hope. He grants us courage. He leads us forward. But that’s getting ahead of our story.

In the beginning God created night and day, land and water, the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. He created all the land animals and every creeping thing on the earth. And then Scripture says: *“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*

In the beginning, at the start, there was specificity, there was structure, and there was order. God creates human beings, a man and a woman, Adam and Eve — like you and like me. As we confess in the Small Catechism, *“I believe that God has made me and all creatures; He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses...”* As it is for us, so it was for Adam and Eve. But then God unites the two as one in marriage, commands them to be fruitful and multiply, and places them as gardeners to tend the land in paradise and rule over all his creatures.

It’s a pretty sweet story so far. But what story would be complete without a villain? Satan, a fallen angel, enters the scene. He’s sinister and sly. His lies wreak havoc on their faith. He tells Eve that God’s word isn’t true, and she believes him.

Eve eats the fruit; gives some to Adam. Their eyes are opened. Now they’re naked and afraid. They hide from God. He confronts their sin. They pass the buck. The curse is

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pronounced. Paradise is lost, but a promise is made. Restoration and salvation would come through the woman and her offspring. It would be by way of the *family* that God's plan of redemption would take place.

So the story of Adam and Eve is our story. Let's not miss the importance of what we learn in the familiar creation narrative: 1) Marriage is defined. 2) Sex and gender are created. 3) Procreation is blessed. 4) Vocations are established. 5) Family is ordered. 6) And modesty is affirmed. In short, we see a divine design of the male and female bodies, created in a complementary fashion, for the purpose of procreation and a full all-encompassing, self-giving expression of love.

By Divine Design

Genesis 2 focuses in for a closeup view of the creation of Adam and Eve:

"The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, '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.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." (Gen 2:20-25)

In God's creative act he establishes a natural order and outcome for his creation. One man and one woman would become one flesh, and from that one flesh sexual union they would create life. In the beginning we then also hear God's first great command: *"Be fruitful and multiply."* (Gen 1:28)

What we casually take for granted about human anatomy and physiology is part of God's intended design for his sexed creatures: the male body is uniquely equipped for insemination, the female body is prepared for impregnation, gestation, and feeding an infant. Simply put, we all came from the union of a man and a woman. Single or married, the family is still the origin of our being. Reclaiming the goodness of family and sexual virtue begins quite simply with men and women, and pastors and parents, recovering and celebrating the God ordained vocations within the family.

Christian men of our day must rediscover and reclaim what it means to be a godly man and godly father — to be a provider and a protector, to act as the head of the household and to have hands of both discipline and love; and especially to recognize that his is not simply a five second contribution during coitus, but a lifetime of contributing to the formation of his children.

Caring Conversations

Reclaiming the family *begins* with parents and grandparents, pastors and teachers, having caring conversations with our children, our grandchildren, our students, and our parishioners about how God 1) creates the family through the one flesh union, 2) orders the family through

the vocations of husband, wife, and children, and 3) sustains the family through the vocations of father, mother and siblings. Having intentional caring conversations is vital to reclaiming the goodness of family and sexual virtue.

This is especially true regarding conversations about the vocations of being male and female. Speaking from the point of creation will certainly fortify approaching this delicate issue from the point of faith, but it will also aid the importance of dealing with simple biological facts. As researcher and Focus on the Family staffer Glen Stanton puts it: “If one is going to hold to a gender-construction theory of gender difference, or that male and female are only different in the bedroom or bathroom, it must be done either in ignorance or denial of a mountain of impressive anthropological, psychological, and neurological scientific research that reveals the opposite.”²

Most people could use some help on what to say about sexuality or how to say it to children or grandchildren, and what age to begin those conversations. In the appendix, I provide some samples of handouts to equip parents and grandparents to talk confidently and appropriately about human biology, sexuality, and marriage with children and grandchildren.

Let’s Talk about Sex

If this is going to do any good at all, we certainly need to go into the details. And this means that we must be comfortable talking about sex,

real sex with each other. Particularly as husbands and wives, but also as the holy Christian church, using appropriate vocabulary, realistic expectations, and biblical confidence. Yet, isn’t it curious how sex — very often one of the most frequent activities between a husband and wife — is one of the least talked about? Why is that? Perhaps it’s because society tells us that sex is all about technique, performance, and gratification — that if you’re not having a mind-blowing orgasm you’re just not having real sex.

But “the reality is sex creates unions, imposes obligations, and establishes responsibilities in ways far beyond our comprehension, and far greater than our physical gratification.”³ Sex is the means through which God performs one of his most astonishing miracles — the creation of life.

Sex belongs in family because sex creates the family. In her thought-provoking book, Lauren Winner contends that sex is meant to be a normal, regular part of the household, where the desire for it is neither repressed nor disordered, but satisfied. It includes intimacy, yes, but also, at times, it includes things like mundane conversation, laughter, and worry — expressions that go far beyond mere orgasm. In a Christian landscape, what’s important about sex is nurtured when we allow sex to be ordinary.

This does not mean that sex will not be meaningful. Its meaning, instead, will partake in the variety of meanings that ordinary life offers. “Sex needs to be clumsy,” Winner writes. “It should at times feel awkward. It should be an act we engage in for

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² Glen Stanton, “The Scientific Objectivity of Gender difference,” *The Family in America: A Journal of Public Policy*, (Vol. 30, no.1, 2016). p. 54.

³ Gene Veith and Mary Moerbe, *Family Vocation: God’s Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood*, (2012). p. 75.

comfort. It should also be allowed to hold any number of anxieties.”⁴ These anxieties might include how we feel about our child’s progress in school, for instance, or our ability to provide sustenance for our family. In other words, sex is more than an orgasm. If we allow sex to be ordinary, we might just understand that human love is forged more out of the ordinary mundane things of life, like cooking together, picking up a loved one’s laundry, or comforting our frightened children, than out of the act of sex itself.

If we want boys and girls to grow up to be men and women who understand and long for biblical manhood and biblical womanhood, who see family as a common good, sexuality as a gift of God, and who are not afraid to talk about it in healthy ways, then we must demonstrate to them the fullness of what that looks like in our homes, as well as be willing to have healthy, appropriate, caring conversations about this in our congregations and schools from early ages on. If our churches and families do not talk about this, the TV, internet, and friends will surely do so, but in unhealthy and harmful ways.

Therefore, we need to love children enough to bring them up from little on in ways that will fortify their biblical identity and equip them to combat the onslaught of this oppressive world, as well as find hope, healing, and forgiveness when and where sin afflicts them. Again, more examples of how to reclaim family integrity in congregation, school, and home are found in the appendix. These tools were forged out of what we did at my previous congregation and parochial school.

We put together classes that we call Parent Partnership Workshops, where we talked about these very issues. We normally had two to four 60-minute Parent Partnership Workshops a year through our parochial school, where we talked about how parents partner with school and church in the education of their children and we partner with them in the faith formation of their children. We provided a small incentive in the form of \$25-\$50 registration credits per class with a set limit for how much each family could earn. We also opened the workshop on biblical sexuality to the public as a community service. Our goal was to constantly lift up the importance of parents in the education and faith life of their children.

Losing Our Virtue: Be (un) fruitful and (do not) multiply?

By saying we need to reclaim the goodness of the family, I am of course suggesting that it has been lost. God’s first command to Adam and Eve was to “*Be fruitful and multiply*” (*Gen 1:28*). Notice that God’s command was prefaced by his blessing. God’s creation thus spills over into procreation; the man and woman he had created separately in his image and likeness were now his instruments in creating still more life through their union. The purpose of his blessing and command is not only to reproduce children, but to reproduce families. There is often so much talk about the decline in the church today, and for good reason. However, my contention is that if the church would boldly celebrate the vocations of life, particularly our family vocations, where we have so many natural opportunities to celebrate and pass on the faith, there

⁴ Lauren Winner, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity*, (2005). p.81.

would be a decided increase of discipleship in the church. However, procreation and evangelization go together in mission. Please note that the command to be fruitful and multiply does not negate the command to make disciples and evangelize, nor does the command to evangelize and make disciples eliminate the command to be fruitful and multiply.

Nonetheless, “*be fruitful and multiply*,” is a command that increasingly rings hollow, where the effects of ignoring it are now being seen with alarming concern. Fertility replacement levels are actually now a worldwide concern. (Fertility replacement is the average number of children per family that need to reach adulthood in order to replace the current population and sustain a country’s common good. 2.1 is the needed replacement level for any country.)

As of late, much has been written and documentaries produced (see *Demographic Winter*) that not only demonstrate the impact upon traditional families, but that also demonstrate a real and serious economic and political concern for countries because of declining population.

Countries without families have fewer children. Fewer children mean fewer workers. Fewer workers mean a shrinking economy: less money, less production, a smaller tax base, a smaller army, plus escalating health and elder care costs. The myth of global overpopulation dies hard, but it is slowly dawning on the industrialized nations that they were fed a lie.

In 1968, the book *The Population Bomb* influenced countless countries with the lie that, by the 1980s, the earth was going to crash and burn from massive overpopulation. The U.N. even bought into this, and

has supported (and continues to support) the implementation of fertility controls in numerous countries. The most notable was in India.

All of this has a direct correlation to the demise of family and family virtue. Facing a mushrooming population of elderly people, China relaxed its one child policy in 2016, though it continues with its oppressive birth permits, forced abortions and sterilizations. Europe has a dismal fertility replacement population — with Lithuania at the lowest rate of 1.3. Japan has already fallen off the demographic cliff, with more than one quarter of its population 65 or older. By 2055, that age group will likely be 40%. By 2025 the country is projected to be short one million nurses and care workers.⁵

The U.S. is a bit better, but falling quickly. In fact, Jonathan Last’s recent book, “*What to Expect When No One’s Expecting*,” examines America’s current 1.93% fertility rate and explores what he views as “America’s coming demographic disaster.” In short, he observes family is not a priority and therefore children are not a priority. In fact, family is out and consumerism is in. People in America apparently would rather buy toys for themselves than have children and buy toys for them.

Curiously, it appears Russia was one of the first countries to formally address this concern. Their fertility replacement levels are well below the needed 2.1 children per household (around 1.73), and have been for quite some time. In fact, in 1995 Russia’s population was 149.6 million people. In 2013 it was around

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⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/business-31908492/how-care-workers-are-coping-with-japan-s-elderly>. Accessed Jan 3, 2019.

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138 million. As a result, interestingly enough, their government was promoting the “traditional family,” while also making same-sex marriage illegal. Their official policy recognizes, in part, what natural law says. It takes a man and a woman to create children and sustain a family for the common good of society.

In any case, sexual virtue within the goodness of the family continues to be threatened. In the face of this, we need to recreate and celebrate a marriage and family culture — that there is something inherently good about sustaining families — where having children is seen to be virtuous and a desirable thing, especially among Christians.

So what can you do?

- 1) You can be bold about lifting up the common good of “family.”
- 2) You can exhibit faithful modeling of marriage and family in your own household.
- 3) You can be bold about teaching what Christian families stand for and how they contribute to the public good.
- 4) You can be active in providing resources for our Christian families to be bold and confident about their virtues.

From Virtue to Values: How Virtue is Lost

Culture changes. But God’s word never changes. His created order never changes. His law and his gospel do not change. And until recently, that’s how it was with virtue. Across time, virtues have always had a transcendent quality about them. Historically a virtue has been understood as 1) moral excellence held in

common and 2) a beneficial trait or quality held in common. Of course, Christian virtue adds the element of the common moral good or beneficial quality as established by God himself, who is, after all, the creator of all there is and called such things “good.”

So it is with the goodness of family. God’s creative act established the family as a moral good and beneficial quality of society. Man and woman were created and given the gift of sexuality through the one flesh union, to which God also gave his blessing and command to be “*fruitful and multiply*.” All virtues, and their expression, flow from God’s creative act of the family.

However, what has happened in our time is that this virtue is being displaced, replaced, and renamed in no small degree. Not only has what is understood as a common moral good and beneficial quality become unclear, but what is understood as a common moral good and beneficial quality among those in the church has become unclear.

The postmodern condition has rendered everything relative. What is good, right, and salutary is now subjective — it’s in the eye of the beholder: “There are no absolute truths!” we’re told — ironically — with absolute certainty.

Regardless, the absurdity of such a claim is missed and the mantras continue. “Whatever makes you happy!” “That may be true for you, but it’s not true for me.” In this postmodern era morals are shifted. Truth is confused. What is beneficial is disregarded. Meaning is adrift, and human existence is cast into functioning chaos.

Theologian David Wells has said we've become "morally obliterated," wherein we are not only "morally illiterate, but morally vacant."⁶ Not too encouraging. But this is increasingly the case. People don't know which way is up. They don't know the story of the world as a place created by God the Father Almighty and redeemed by his only Son Jesus Christ. Certainly we need to tell them that story. But we have to be sure that we know that story well ourselves — and the vocabulary that goes with that story.

Unfortunately, the vocabulary of the church (our vocabulary) has been forgotten. Thus our story is compromised. If you ask a student or church member, "What are some virtues you can think of?" blank stares are often given in answer. Things like justice, prudence, restraint, and courage, are not directly accessible to them as virtues. Even the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are not as familiar as they once were. Often people don't even know the definition of a virtue, or its opposite — a vice — for that matter.⁷

Sadly, this moral amnesia has been spreading in our society for quite some time. Moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has been charting

⁶ David Wells. *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision*, (1998). p. 13.

⁷ The alternative list of the seven heavenly virtues consists of *charity, chastity, diligence, humility, kindness, temperance and patience* and basically stands in opposition to the seven deadly sins (wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony). The medieval categories of "The Seven Cardinal Virtues" helped in propagating the concept of good virtues against the evil vices across Europe. One could be unscathed by the seven deadly sins by inculcating the seven heavenly virtues. For example by practicing the virtue of humility one could resist the temptation of the deadly sin of pride.

this for decades. Already thirty years ago he said our "language of morality" has been lost, as has our practice of it.⁸ So what has been happening? How was it lost?

In short, virtue is being replaced by values. When everything is relative or subjective, virtue ceases to be virtuous. There is no longer an objective truth and objective good held in common and no language to identify the common good. Thus, virtue is replaced by values — it could be a preference, a feeling, a belief, or a habit, even a vice — basically, anything that any individual, group, or society happens to value, at any time, for any reason.

So when virtue is emptied of morality and replaced by value, anything goes. This is how same-sex marriage can go from being utterly unheard of and unthinkable for all of recorded history, to rapidly becoming a *value* for many Americans, and somehow ruled a constitutional right by the U.S. Supreme Court.

So what can you do?

- 1) You can be intentional about reclaiming the vocabulary of virtues.
- 2) You can teach virtues in your homes, to your children, starting when they are young.
- 3) You can speak of and teach Christian virtues in your congregations.
- 4) Most important of all, you can live virtuous lives and model what it means to be a Christian in a world that has lost its story and knows no virtue.

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⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (2007), p.2.

Biblical Sexuality: A Lost Virtue?

The creation account focuses our attention on the origins of biblical sexual virtue. Genesis 1:25 gives a starting point to consider the fullness of biblical sexuality, particularly as it entails the dignity and honor of our human bodies: *“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”*

In perfection, Adam and Eve stood naked before their creator and felt no shame. This is as it should be, for God had called them and their bodies “good,” after all. But when the fall into sin came, and their eyes were opened, shame at their nakedness followed and they hid from God. After the curse was declared, God himself gives them coverings (Gen 3:21). Yet, ever since, human beings have been taking those coverings off, but now with no shame.

In our culture there is no shame over explicit nudity. Regard for what God deemed necessary to cover has been cast aside as readily as a stripper at work. There is no shame in explicit sexuality on TV, magazine newsstands, and especially the internet. Sex sells and so sex is everywhere. In the public sphere there is no sense of sexual shame, only indulgence, only decadence.

In the home, it seems no one talks about it. Body parts are renamed and spoken of in code. Husbands and wives are too embarrassed to talk about sex. Yet they let their children dress as if they are going out for sexual encounters, while simultaneously telling them, “Sex is bad. Don’t you dare do it!” Kids then either fall victim to the sexual norms of society and give into temptation or feel dirty when they do have intercourse after

they finally marry. In other words, they are confused.

I can still remember looking up the word “masturbation” in the dictionary when I was in seventh grade. I had heard it on some TV show and I didn’t know what it meant. After reading about it I still wasn’t sure since I hadn’t yet experienced it. So I had to look up “erection,” “orgasm” and “ejaculation” to even begin understanding the definition. In the end, I was confused. How much better to teach our children how their body parts work in age appropriate ways as well as God’s design for them so they can avoid confusion and gain respect for their own bodies and the bodies of the opposite sex.

The creation account reminds us that God did create a good and right erotic sexual desire to be expressed within the context of a one-man and one-woman marriage relationship. When no suitable helper could be found for Adam, God creates Eve from his own flesh. When Adam finally sees her for the first time, Scripture documents a healthy erotic desire present within Adam’s joy of finally receiving a helpmate suitable for him: *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”* (Gen 2:23). But do we take the time to appropriately address this healthy aspect of sexuality and God-created desire with our children? Do we help them navigate the raging hormones that can disorient that proper desire and turn it into unbridled lust? We must be willing to have age appropriate, mature conversations to help equip not only our parents, but our children to find their way through desire and lust if we want to reclaim the fullness and joy of sexual virtue within the family.

Tragically, we have become ashamed of a good gift of creation in the home, among a family, within a marriage, where it is designed to be expressed, while our culture displays it openly and demanding in public, in epidemic proportions, devoid of the public virtue it once was, and irreverently flaunting it as the end all and be all of personal gratification.

But all is not lost. Do not despair. There is hope. Christ the Bridegroom wraps his love and protection around us. Paul reminds us: *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”* (Eph 5:25-27) Christ adorns his bride — us! He washes us clean, and gives us life, so that we can, with a good conscience, for the good of all, live out our God-created vocations.

So, what can you do?

- 1) You can speak about the dignity and honor of our God-created bodies with your children.
- 2) You can become comfortable talking about sex positively, as a good gift of God, designed for the specific context of marriage.
- 3) You can begin thinking about how you would talk about sex and family, in age appropriate ways, using a virtuous vocabulary, to toddlers and teenagers alike.

“They do not even know how to blush:” A Culture of Explicit Sexuality

Our society is not easily embarrassed. In our sexually explicit cul-

ture, few know how to blush. Some might say our society has gone from modesty to midriffs; from classy to cleavage; from purity to pornography; from friends to friends-with-benefits. But is this really anything new? Listen to how God spoke to the Israelites:

“Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return...” “How can you say, “We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD,” when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?... Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the LORD.” (Jer 8:5-12) (NIV)

Our culture is one that does not know how to blush. We are an image-based, narcissistic culture. “How’s my look? How’s your look? How’s she look?” That’s our M.O. And it’s had a profoundly negative effect.

We have become desensitized. Women are objectified. With six young children, 15 years old and under (four daughters and two sons), I am acutely aware of this reality. I don’t want them to be or to feel objectified. And I don’t want them to believe they have to act out sexually in order to be liked. Yet, magazine stands at the grocery store are covered with women who are barely covered. TV and reality shows look to boost ratings by including more skin and more sex scenes. Modesty has

been lost. Self-control has been unlearned.

My daughters have long been asking, “Why do girls dress like that, dad?” My 15-year-old daughter is now in the unhappy battle of balancing style and modesty, while trying to fit in with friends at school. Nonetheless, I actually welcome these tensions and questions as great opportunities for caring conversations about modesty in dress and the dignity of our bodies; to talk like the apostle Paul does to the Corinthians: “[O]n those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our un-presentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require” (1 Cor 12:23-24). It is a reminder that what God covered up still calls for covering today. To put it another way, covering one’s skin does not mean you are hiding your body, but rather revealing your dignity. This is a hard sell today.

Sadly, many men don’t see women as a whole person anymore. They see them as assemblages of body parts, evaluating them by their breasts and their butts. They have uncontrolled eyes — taught by society from early on that a woman’s body is meant for male ogling.

However, I want my sons to be free from the battles of untrained and lustful eyes. Since he was three years old, I have been attempting to teach my 12-year-old son (using age appropriate language and behavior) the importance of showing respect to women and their bodies by controlling his eyes, knowing when to look away, and knowing how to compliment a lady. (My other son is only 17-months-old at this writing, but his turn is coming.)

Many women simply do not recognize just how distinct the difference is between men and women. Men are visually stimulated — lustfully so — in a much higher degree than women realize. My girls need to know this. Not so that they think all men are pigs, but to learn from a young age how to protect the dignity of their bodies, and to be able to encourage Christian men in the training of their eyes.

Commercials during football games sell sex as much as they do beer. On-demand TV shows like “13 Reasons Why,” (about bullying and suicide) “Big Mouth” (filled with lewd jokes about adolescent bodies, including menstruation and nocturnal emissions) and “I am Jazz” (a show about a transgender boy growing up as a girl), are barraging minds with an open view of sexuality. Social media is filled with sexual conquests and trophies. I don’t want my children’s instruction in sexuality to come from the culture. Therefore, this means I had to be prepared to intentionally lay a foundation for them regarding these virtues while they were yet being conceived. It is likewise for all Christian parents. And it is likewise for the church. We do this by reclaiming sexual virtue within the circle of the family.

So, what can you do?

- 1) You can teach female toddlers and teenagers alike that their identity is not found in the skimpy clothes that they wear, but in the baptismal righteousness that covers them.
- 2) You can teach male toddlers and teenagers alike how to train their eyes and respect women.
- 3) Probably most importantly, you can humbly model these things to

your children, the congregation, and the community.

The Sexual Revolution: The New Virtue?

The current sexually explicit epidemic has its origins in the sexual revolution of the 1960s. To be sure, the slogan “*make love, not war*” was part of the 60s culture. But the core of the sexual revolution came not in a slogan, but with the advent of the birth control pill.

When this little pill was approved in 1960 it would go on to change the relations between the sexes, and subsequently the family, as never before. To be clear, there was a long running sexual revolution occurring in countries long before this date. However, as has been heavily documented, it was contraceptive technologies that gave this revolution capital letters.

Mary Eberstadt tracks this quite compellingly in her recent book, *How the West Really Lost God*. She notes, “Once the genie of the Pill was literally out of the bottle, extra-marital sex became easier — freer of the immediate consequences of pregnancy — than ever before.” The result had a seismic impact on family formation. Divorce rates soared. The sexual market place grew and grew with every woman who took the Pill, which in turn made it ever less likely that a man would marry simply for the sake of a sexual partner. Consequently, and interestingly, out of wedlock births soared as well.

According to Eberstadt: “The Pill contributed to the weakening of the family bonds as no other technological force in history.”⁹ Her work offers a

profound word of caution. She took up the study of the family and its impact upon the demographics of the church. In short, she has a simple but compelling hypothesis — family decline fuels religious decline.

Her basic premise is that faith and the family forms an interwoven “double helix.” Where one goes, the other is sure to follow. In other words, it is not just as Christianity goes, so goes the family. But the reverse as well — as the family goes, so goes Christianity. Thus, where America is riddled by broken families, nontraditional families, and anti-family segments, there is apt demonstration of why America is becoming increasingly secular. The family unit is no longer solidified by the Christian message. Nor are families passing on the Christian faith and its corresponding morals.

Eberstadt breaks it down in clear terms: “Do the math,” she says. “More Pill equals less time in a family. More time in family equals more time in church. Therefore more Pill equals less God... In sum,” she says, “it was the sexual revolution that has done the most to weaken the family and with it, the Family Factor.”¹⁰

Let me be blunt. The more people that have sex outside of marriage, the less incentive there is for marriage in the first place. And as a result, there is more reluctance to commit to the official Christian teaching on sex and family.

Simply consider our culture of “hook ups” and “friends with benefits” — both terms for casual sex. Cultural media regularly celebrates this open view of sexuality. Consider the New York Times article reported on the study done at Penn State University of how the girls there were just as

⁹ Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, (2013) p.135.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.136.

apt as guys to push for “hooking up.” Or the Huffington Post article by a female author, who listed five reasons why everyone needs to have sex before marriage.¹¹

With more people living without marriage and family, more men and women have profound new reasons to tell themselves that the Christian moral code is out of date. We have lost our virtue. Even our youth who grow up in traditional families are being inundated by the increase of nontraditional families and the explosion of this open sexuality. In fact, they are very often the ones questioning the church’s teaching on sexuality as repressive and bigoted. Are we prepared to answer clearly, promptly, and compassionately?

Even further, with more and more children growing up in one-parent — typically fatherless — homes, fewer parents have the resources (or the motivation) to be sure their children make it to religious instruction or even to church.

So what can you do?

- 1) You can explore ways to help fortify the bond of the families in your congregation.
- 2) You can look at how you can serve, support, and pray for the single parent families of your congregation and community.
- 3) You can begin to chew over the implications that contraceptives have upon family formation, opening up fraternal discussion with other pastors.

¹¹ Kiri Blakely, “Sex Before Marriage: 5 Reasons Every Couple Should Do It.” https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/26/sex-before-marriage_n_3333073.html (accessed Feb. 19, 2019).

Speaking the Truth in Love

We are always called to speak the truth in love. Please read what I have to say here with compassion and care as I point out some of the hard realities of where I believe we in the church have let people down. We need to speak the truth in love, care and compassion about what Christians have chosen to ignore concerning marital fidelity and procreation.

Within the last 100 years, massive shifts have occurred in specific teachings of the church that have contributed toward the demise of the family. Confusion has come by changes to the teachings regarding 1) divorce, 2) contraception, and 3) homosexuality.

It first began with divorce, and as Mary Eberstadt points out, the pattern of logic went like this: First, limited exceptions were made to the rule of no divorce. (To a degree, this seems rather scriptural.) But, after further study, those exceptions seemed too restrictive, and other considerations needed to be taken, so the exceptions were no longer limited and now became the norm; finally, that new norm itself (perhaps summarized as no fault divorce, or divorce for any reason and its consequence: serial monogamy) is sanctified by the church as theologically acceptable.

Of course, not every church body officially holds to this exact position, but in general, and by common consent, this is the understood logic and use. Sadly, the same logic has been applied by segments of the church to the issues of contraception and homosexuality. To be sure, some churches say a lot about homosexuality, but it’s time to be more intentional and thoughtful about talk-

ing to our people about the use of contraceptives and opening up this topic for fraternal conversation once again in the church at large. Family integrity and the marriage culture is involved.

Pastors can walk couples through a pre-marital process that includes candid caring conversations about sexuality and contraception, and what the Scripture has to say about both. Though pastors are not voyeurs, we are called to be physicians of souls, and gentle yet forthright conversation about sex is especially needed to correct the misbeliefs embraced everywhere in our culture. This is really a matter of responsible soul care. Talk to them about how sex is more than an orgasm, but by God's design intimately tied to procreation. Let them know how some birth control pills are functional abortifacients, the dangers of IUDs, and that there will never be "a right time" to have children. If you don't know where to begin, ZoeScore.com is a great pre-marital tool to become trained in and to use for this process.

Remember to use a proper balance of law and gospel in all these matters. At every opportunity, it is a pastor's joyful calling to deliver a good conscience to broken hearts and wounded souls in the name of Jesus Christ. Where sin abounds, there grace much more abounds. Therefore help young single Christians who fight a daily battle against illicit or disordered desires to find strength and hope in daily drowning their sinful lusts and living in union with Christ. Help your young couples who have followed the culture into active cohabitation or sexual unions apart from marriage to find forgiveness for their sins. Help divorced people to recover a clean heart and a right

spirit by repentance and faith in their Redeemer's love. Help parents who have never thought through contraception before to make a new start in Christ's forgiving love and a joyful new beginning in him.

What else can you do?

1) Trust the word of the Lord. Ephesians 5:25-27 reminds us of the bridegroom. Cling to his promises.

2) Pastors, regularly speak with love to your congregations about the devastation of divorce, the dangers of disordered desires, the implications of contraceptives, and the consoling peace of Christ for every penitent sinner.

3) Parents, talk to your children from little on about the permanence and commitment of marriage and about the importance and joy of welcoming and nurturing children.

The Impact of Pornography

Leave a toddler alone in a bathroom for five seconds, and they somehow unroll three hundred feet of toilet paper with lightning speed. When you walk in, they're like, "What? This stuff was obviously made for me, right?" All the geniuses at Fisher Price have yet to develop something as fun as a 99-cent roll of toilet paper.

If only our children could stay interested in toilet paper. Thanks to the internet, there are now well over *four million* pornographic internet sites worldwide to interest our children. To be sure, these sites belong in the toilet. But if kids have not been informed and formed on how to navigate the internet, these sites can unroll the sexual innocence and purity of our children at lightning fast speeds.

Formerly a back-alley, mafia-funded industry, pornography has exploded into a socially omnipresent form of entertainment. We are now living in a country that has accepted, and even embraced, pornography's cultural infiltration. For perspective, the annual revenues of the porn industry exceed \$14 billion in the United States and \$100 billion worldwide.

The sad fact is studies have conclusively revealed that early exposure and experiences with sexuality do have a permanent and often negative impact on children. It can lead to promiscuity, same sex attraction — particularly if that was their first image/video accessed — porn addiction, and loss of self-esteem.

I myself was exposed far too young on two separate occasions, in third grade and then sixth grade. Though I did not experience an extremely negative impact, pornography was an issue for me in my early adult life. God's love and grace have brought remedy to that now. But no doubt there are those reading this for whom pornography is currently an issue. No doubt a good amount of guilt afflicts you because of it.

If this is true for you, as it was for me, remember that you are a new creation in Christ. Be sure to see a pastor (even if you are a pastor) and speak with him about it. He will have good news for you. Confession and absolution are powerful healers. You have been baptized into Christ. The old sinful self has been crucified and the new self has been raised up with Christ. In him you can make a new beginning with a good and clean conscience.

Nonetheless, porn addiction is on the rise. Reliable research indicates that there are between 18 and 24

million admitted sex addicts in the United States, the vast majority of whom are addicted to online sexual behavior. As a porn addict's physiological tolerance for sexually explicit material builds up, users are driven to view more and more deviant images to achieve the same levels of sensual satisfaction. They find themselves, as C.S. Lewis once put it, with "an ever-increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure."

Sadly, as the addict's craving for erotic images waxes, his capacity for arousal by the "real thing" wanes. Husbands have reported going through hell from their addiction. Some men experience Erectile Dysfunction (ED). Enter in all the male sexual enhancement drugs. The connection between the two industries is unquestionable.

What is more, studies have conclusively shown that the chemical high the brain produces when viewing pornography is similar to that of cocaine. And just like any drug, one needs more and more to get the desired high. In pornography addiction, this leads to increasingly graphic and hard-core porn, which ultimately can tragically lead first to child porn and then to pedophilia.

So, has the U.S. government done anything about the pornography epidemic? Right now the government actually protects "soft" pornography as free speech. However, the internet is rampant with graphic hard-core pornography and law enforcement is not doing much about it.

In 1998 Congress passed the Child Online Protection Act (COPA), which sought to greatly tighten restrictions on what was allowable. The law was challenged. Though it remains on the books today, in early 2009 the

*Confession
and absolution
are powerful
healers.*

Supreme Court decided that it would not hear the COPA case again, effectively killing the law once and for all. (You may remember 2012 presidential candidate Rick Santorum brought this up as a part of his platform, decrying the effects of pornography on our society, and deriding the government's failure to enforce this law.)

The fact is, government-funded sex education programs are more prone to feed the porn industry than to stop it. Planned Parenthood and SIECUS, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. are the largest providers of sex education in the U.S. They teach that sex outside of marriage has nothing to do with morality and little to do with biology. Rather, they teach teens how to "have sex:" specifically, how to give themselves and their partners genital pleasure, and how to lessen their chances of becoming pregnant or infected with sexually transmitted diseases.

Sadly, and some of you may find this a bit shocking, the largest group of viewers of online pornography are children between the ages of 12 and 17.¹² The average age of first exposure to internet porn is estimated to be eight! This is often simply due to a casual search on the internet, which is ingeniously manipulated by porn companies to point to their websites. Thankfully there are wonderful internet filters for families to use (see appendix).

To be sure, this seems overwhelmingly depressing. You may be asking is there any hope? What can combat such a powerful force? Well, I know a man. His name is Jesus. The pow-

er of this man was such that even death could not stop him. He is the light no darkness can overcome. Listen to what he says: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12) We live in this light and we live in this hope.

So what can you do?

- 1) Educate yourself about the dangers of pornography. If you are trapped in pornography get pastoral help. Consult a Sex-aholics Anonymous (SA) counselor.
- 2) Talk to your congressman about enforcing the law.
- 3) Protect your family and congregation from porn with internet filters.
- 4) Talk to your kids about porn and be vigilant about training them how to use the internet if they have smartphones or iPads and put all home computers in a common area in your house.
- 5) Rejoice that Christ is the light, which no darkness can overcome.

*God created
erotic sexual
desire as a
good thing*

The Goodness of Sex

But let's be clear on the positive purpose of sex. God created erotic sexual desire as a good thing, as we clearly saw in Adam's delight over the creation of Eve. Thus, since we are *for* the family, that means we are certainly also *for* sex. And let's be honest. We like it. God made it to be enjoyed within marriage. We approve of it.

Sex distinctions and sexual desire is clearly and unequivocally part of the creation that God called good. Remember, nakedness was not originally a problem for human beings until sin disordered and dishonored it. Likewise, sin has disordered, dis-

¹² (From the nonprofit organization *Enough is Enough*. See their website www.enough.org).

honored, and defiled the healthy, erotic love that was created exclusively for a husband and wife in a lifelong relationship.

Sadly, pulling sex apart from marriage and parenthood has bastardized it. And though all sins are equally condemning, they are not all equally defiling. Sexual sins of all sorts are more defiling because they sin against the body, which is to be a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The point here is to note that, in the beginning, God reveals how the crown jewels of his creation were intricately and intentionally made as complementary sexual beings. They experienced erotic desire, not only to express their love and affection but to create the family. From there, family creates culture and culture orders society. This means the government doesn't create the family, rather, government actually flows from the family, as does every other human authority present in society. Therefore, the family brings about the common good and benefits all humanity.

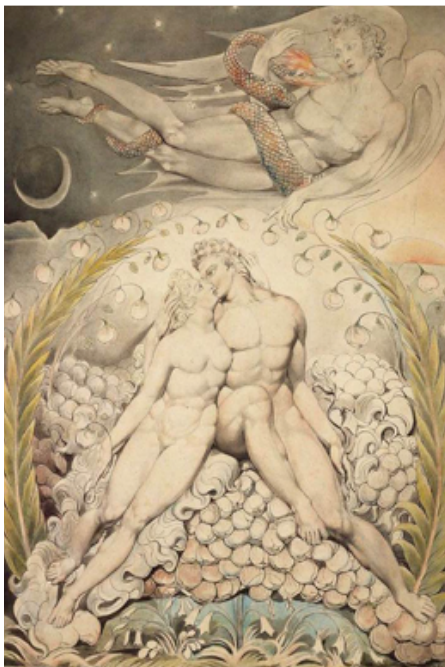
*God uses
the family to
redeem the
world.*

The Attack of Satan

However, that is precisely why Satan attacks the family. He has a sinister plan. Satan attacks Adam and Eve not only to get them to disobey God's command. He attacks them in their vocations as a husband and wife (even their maleness and female-

ness) in an effort to destroy the family. Why? Because he hates what it represents and how it points to the triune God.

A painting that portrays this so well is the painting by William Blake done in 1808 for Milton's *Paradise Lost*, titled *Satan Watching the Caresses of Adam and Eve*.¹³ Satan can see in their love and intimacy the powerful representation of God — the image and likeness of God. This enrages Satan. So, he launches his attack, tells his lies, and strikes a victory for evil.



This is the part of the story where the villain has seemingly won the day. However, this story is nowhere near finished. The story doesn't stop here. There is still more to tell. There is still much to hear. Hope is on the way. Redemption and restoration are still to come! This is the story of our salvation, the story of the Holy Scriptures, the story revealed every Lord's Day as Christ Jesus is publicly proclaimed as the victim who became the Victor, triumphing over Satan and all his lies by his atoning death and mighty resurrection from the dead.

Being for the Family: from Generation to Generation

Good authors, of course, know how to captivate their readers and deliver the goods. Good authors know how

¹³ Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

to make their words come alive. As God is the author and perfecter of our faith, he literally makes his word come alive. It's living and active, sharper than any two edged sword. It's the very Word that was present in the beginning of creation, calling forth the light that comes into the flesh. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, put into a family, the Word made his dwelling among us.

This is no small wonder. Where Satan seeks to destroy the family, God uses the family to redeem the world. Ours is a message not merely of warning against the destruction all around; it is a message of hope and confidence in our Redeemer. Therefore, it's worth repeating: you and I stand **for** the family. You and I stand **for** godly men and women. We stand **for** faithful husbands and wives. We can stand **for** faithful fathers and mothers, and households full of faithful children.

You and I can lift up our young men and young women. We can teach our children, raise them in the way of the Lord, bring up the next generation of faith-filled, truth-speaking, devil stomping, baptized believers, who will never back down, never give up — who will fight for what's right — and stand firm on the foundation of Jesus Christ crucified.

By his sacrificial death and in his victorious resurrection, Christ Jesus has defeated Satan and all of his lies. He has paid for our transgressions and paved the way for confident, faithful expressions of sexuality in word and deed.

He is the light no darkness can overcome! That means the darkness of our times cannot thwart him. We stand in his light. We boldly lift high

his cross. And we boldly take our stand **for** the family.

Taking a stand **for** the family will teach our children to embrace what is good, rather than simply fear what is bad. It will also do much to neutralize the claims that Christians are anti-love bigots. Being **for** the family offers a much broader platform to stand upon, and gives us much to celebrate during these challenging times.

Parent Partnership Workshops

To that end, if we want boys and girls to be confident in their bodies, it is our joyous challenge to teach them the story of who they are as unique creations of a gracious God, redeemed by his beloved Son and sanctified by his Spirit. If we want them to grow up to be men and women who understand and long for biblical manhood and biblical womanhood, who see the family as a common good for all of mankind, their sexuality as a blessing of God, and who are not afraid to talk about it in healthy ways, then we must demonstrate to them the fullness of what that looks like.

We need to love them enough to bring them up from little on in ways that will fortify their biblical identity and equip them to combat the onslaught of this oppressive world, as well as find hope, healing, and forgiveness when and where sin afflicts them. This was the goal of the Parent Partnership Workshops we conducted at my previous parish. In the appendix you will find a general framework and some examples of how to do this — how you can find your voice and joyfully uphold family and sexual virtue in congregation, school, and home.

*This is a
moment
for clear
Christological
confession of
truth*

This is a moment for clear Christological confession of truth in a confused, chaotic world. This is your personal time to step up and make a difference in a world that has lost its way. Together, this is our collective time to let our lights shine in a world that seems to grow ever more dark and dreary each passing day. Our lights shine with borrowed light, reflected from Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Thank God, he remains forever the Light no darkness can ever overcome. ☒

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APPENDIX: Resources

Modesty and Sexuality: Caring Conversation Tips

“How do I talk to my children or grandchildren about modesty and virtue?”

- ◊ Become intentional about having caring conversations with them already starting at the age of two (or as soon as they can talk). Begin to define it for them in language they can understand. Speak about biblical honor and virtue with them.
- ◊ Model modesty in dress, speech, and TV viewing.
- ◊ Read to them at night. (Include regular stories but also books on virtues.)
- ◊ Be on the same page with your spouse (as parents or grandparents).

“How do I talk to my children or grandchildren about sexuality?”

- ◊ Become intentional about having caring conversations with your child/children or grandchildren.
- ◊ Be on the same page with your spouse and become comfortable talking about “it” and not just “doing it.”
- ◊ See sexuality through God’s eyes. (He created it after all.)

“When do I talk with them about sex?”

- ◊ The first time your child (or grandchild) asks you a question about it. *(Don’t freak out! Keep the answer simple and honest. Details can be appropriate to the*

age of the child. And when they ask “Why?” you can say, “Because God made it that way.”)

- ◊ When you teach them about being a family. *(Begin teaching about God’s creation of family in preschool, i.e. mom, dad, brother, sister, baby, etc.)*

“Where do I start if I haven’t been doing that?”

- ◊ Begin where you and your children (grandchildren) are at.
- ◊ Be intentional.
- ◊ Start small.
- ◊ Create a foundation.
- ◊ Be consistent.
- ◊ Openly use proper language to refer to body parts and sexuality (particularly when your children/grandchildren are young). Kids learn to be embarrassed if you are.

Bible References on sexuality and modesty:

Genesis 2:22-25; Proverbs 5 and 7; Jeremiah 8:5-12; Ezekiel 6:9, 23:3; Hosea 8:5-6; Matthew 5:28; Mark 7:21-23; Acts 15:29; Romans 13:12-13; 1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:13-18; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 5:3-4; Colossians 3:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; Hebrews 12:16; 13:4; 1 Peter 4:3; Jude 7; Revelation 2:14; 2:20; 21:8.

SAMPLE: Parent Partnership Workshop: Teaching Biblical Gender in a Transgender World.

1. Intro – Conversation Starter:
A transgender kindergarten student enrolls at your school, whose parents want every teacher, student, and parent to call them by their transgender pronoun and use the bathroom of their preference. What would you do?

2. Gender Dysphoria and the Transgender Agenda

i. Gender Dysphoria: the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite from one's biological sex.

ii. Gender Mainstreaming: is the public policy concept of assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programs, in all areas and levels. Mainstreaming essentially offers a pluralistic approach that devalues the distinctions of both men and women and seeks to normalize transgender preferences.

3. Stand Firm: Don't Despair!

i. John 8:12... Jesus Christ is the light no darkness can overcome...

ii. Recognize the realities of Gender Dysphoria and show compassion for these tortured souls.

4. How can we prepare our children?

i. Speak confidently and openly about our God-created bodies and their unique design.

ii. Where should we start teaching our children?

iii. Start with Genesis 1 and 2, the creation account, "God made them male and female."

iv. When do we teach our children? Now! (As soon as they are able to talk.)

v. Help them to feel secure in their bodies and comfortable with their anatomy.

vi. Help them to be compassionate toward others who are confused about their identity.

vii. "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 1:13).

◊ What does it mean to prepare our minds for action?

◊ Be informed about the issues.

◊ Know the biblical teaching.

◊ Discern to whom you are talking (believer or unbeliever) to direct how you will season your conversation.

5. Discussion

i. Genesis 1:27-28

ii. What are five attributes of being male?

iii. What are five attributes of being female?

iv. How are men and women different?

◊ Physically?

◊ Emotionally?

◊ Mentally?

v. So are the sexes different for a reason?

vi. Genesis 2:20-26

vii. What do these biblical texts say about:

◊ Our bodies?

◊ Our identity?

- ◊ The treatment of our bodies? (i.e. genital mutilation)?
- viii. The First Article of the Apostles' Creed: What does this mean?
- 6. What can we do? As Christians, as parents, as citizens?
 - i. Become educated on the arguments of Gender Mainstreaming. Not everybody will agree on who God is or if he exists, but we can begin by agreeing upon who we are and what it means to be human.
 - ii. Know the vocabulary and be comfortable calmly speaking with others. Be able to say more than "The Bible says..."
 - iii. Be actively engaged in your community; exercise your civic responsibility.
 - iv. Teach your children in the way of the Lord. The future is in our children! Now is a great time to be raising our children!
 - v. Pray.
 - vi. Study the word of God: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe..." (Rom. 1:16)
 - vii. Witness (intentionally) to others in your vocations.
 - viii. Watch God work in their hearts and transform their lives.
 - ix. Look with eyes of faith even when it seems dark: Christ is the light that no darkness can overcome!
 - x. Use reason, logic, and natural law, to make a respectful, reasonable, and sensible case for public policy (which includes laws, order, and the common good).
 - xi. Know what the Scriptures say: "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being

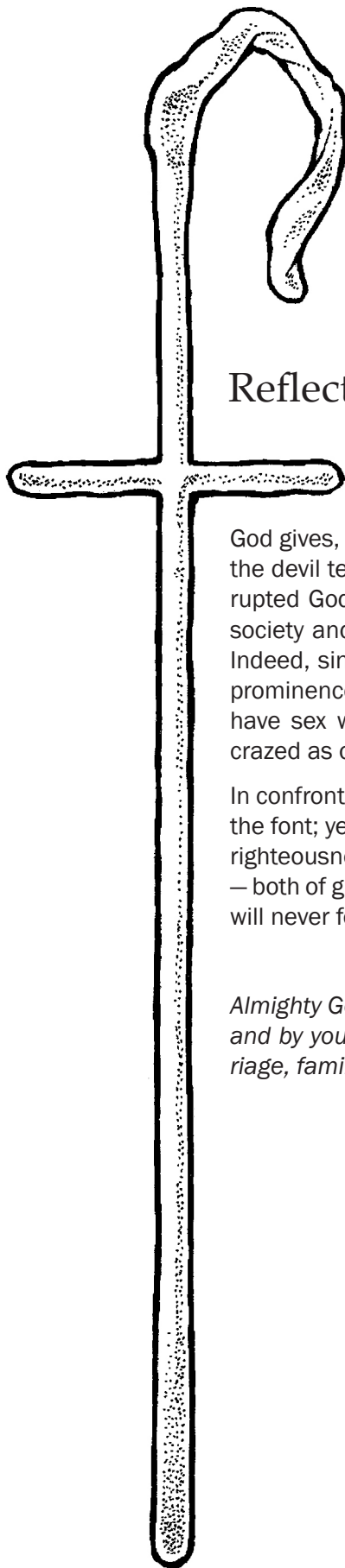
- prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." (1 Pet 3:15)
- xii. Family mainstreaming instead of gender mainstreaming.
- xiii. Marriage only between one man and one woman is not discriminatory, but a biological reality.
- xiv. Legal enforcement of the right of a child to their biological mother and father.
- xv. Legal enforcement of the right of parents to raise their children according to their values.
- xvi. No sexualization of children and teenagers through secular mandatory comprehensive sex education in public schools.
- xvii. No inclusion of "sexual identity" or "sexual orientation" in antidiscrimination laws.
- xviii. International and nationwide campaigns against pornography.
- xix. Protection of the right to life from conception to natural death.

Resources

- ◇ “What carries people through in a crisis? Families are the social safety net, because they stick together and are willing to share. Faith is the spiritual safety net that gives people refuge in their misfortune and an unshakable hope. We don’t know what phase of human history we are in, but Christians know that the story will come out well.” Gabriele Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015.) 278.
- ◇ Mary Katherine Ham and Guy Benson. *End of Discussion: How the Left’s Outrage Industry Shuts Down Debate, Manipulates Voters, and Makes America Less Free (and FUN)*. (New York: Crown Publishing, 2015).
- ◇ Glenn Stanton. *The Family Project: How God Reveals His Best For You*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014).
- ◇ David Kupelian. *The Snapping of the American Mind: Healing a Nation Broken by a Lawless Government and Godless Culture*. (WND Books, 2015).

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Reflection

God gives, orders and preserves. The more precious and powerful the gift, the more the devil tempts man to reject, disorder and abuse. It's no secret that man has corrupted God's gifts of marriage, sex and family: the effects are evident throughout society and among the people of God. One wonders how far the rejection can go. Indeed, since Pastor Woodford first submitted this essay, digisexuality has risen to prominence, whose adherents predict that a large percentage of people will soon have sex without ever ... interacting sexually with another human being. As sex-crazed as our society has been, it is beginning even to reject the gift of intercourse.

In confronting this morass of sexual chaos, it may seem quaint and futile to begin at the font; yet, if God's temporal gifts are to be restored, one must first have faith and righteousness restored. Set at peace with God, we can then extol his gifts to others — both of grace and life, and marriage and sexuality. We do so with hope, for the Lord will never forsake his bride, nor his children.



Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, preserve your gifts among your holy people; and by your grace, enable us to practice, teach and defend your blessings of marriage, family and sexuality; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pastor Tim Pauls