

God's Design for Man & Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey

Good morning! I'm so grateful that Colonial is hosting this wonderful conference and in particular that those organizing the conference have chosen "Ministering to the Family" as the topic for this year. Such a vital topic! It seems like the culture continues to be abuzz with gender messages, ranging from the confusing to the bizarre, while the church is either scrambling to respond or choosing to remain mostly silent in the face of the massive challenges to the biblical teaching on gender that we've witnessed particularly in the last few years. In part, at least, the church may be speechless not so much because it has nothing to say but because the culture is changing at such a breathtaking pace that it is hard to know what to say and how to say it. The issue of gender identity and sexual orientation is rife at our schools, our businesses, even our bathrooms—and it's not going to go away anytime soon. Dear brothers and sisters, if we want to minister to the family effectively in this brave new gender world, we've got to have our theology straight more than ever before. We've got to be biblically grounded. Doctrine and application must go together, just as in Paul's letters where often the first half is devoted to doctrine and the second half to application (or, in the case of Romans, the first three quarters are doctrine and last quarter is application).

When Margaret and I submitted our manuscript on *God's Design for Man and Woman* to our publisher a few years ago, it included an opening vignette, first reported in *The New York Times* on August 8, 2012, on a little boy named Alex who wanted to go to preschool in a girl's dress. At first, the parents were shocked and tried to fight their son's "gender fluidity" (one of several new recently coined terms that have gained rapid currency in our cultural climate), but eventually they decided to talk to some of the parents of their son's classmates and found them to be remarkably tolerant. After consulting a child psychologist, they decided the most important thing was to affirm Alex in who he felt he really was. They opted to support their son's newly chosen identity as a girl and the next morning Alex went to school in a purple, pink, and yellow-striped dress.

That was three years ago already. The publisher conveyed to us at that time that the opening anecdote may be too extreme and suggested that we replace it with a more mainstream illustration (which we did, with a story about our family stopping at a Cracker Barrel and discussing a play we had just seen [p. 24], but we also decided to keep the story about Alex and move it to the middle of the book [p. 122]). Little did the publisher and we know that what seemed extreme just three short years ago is today all but commonplace (or at least is not perceived nearly as bizarre as it might have been just a little while ago). How fast the culture has moved! It's like a moving target.

A young man I currently mentor is a sophomore and business major at NC State and also an RA. During RA orientation earlier this fall, he told me that he and the other RAs were instructed to forget everything they ever learned about gender. The binary notion of male and female, they were told, is a thing of the past. Instead, people come in many shades and colors, and the role of these RAs is not only to accept those various shades of gender identity but positively to embrace and even celebrate them. Of course, confusion about one's gender identity is not the same as confusion about one's sexual orientation, but they are all part of the same cultural confusion about human sexual identity.

The speed by which the biblical teaching on gender has been replaced with a subjective, postmodern view—according to which gender is nothing but a social, subjective construct severed from biological sex—has taken many of us by surprise. Where will it end? Just last week Miley Cyrus declared herself "pansexual." And just this past weekend, I read a *New York Times* Sunday review article by Judith Shulevitz entitled, "Is It Time to Desegregate the Sexes?" (October 15, 2016). She writes that she sees only "two ways to resolve the conflict between transgender rights and privacy interests":

The first would be to stop teaching the sexes to hide their bodies from each other. Scientists mostly agree that sexual identity is multifarious, not binary; fungible, not fixed. Sex-linked chromosomes; hormones; the internalization of cultural expectations—all develop differently in each individual, yielding a gamut of sexualities. Perhaps it's time to retire the notion of two sexes.

Colleges already have mixed dormitories; offices offer gender-neutral bathrooms. In a recent market survey of 13- to 20-year-olds, a third strongly agreed that gender doesn't define a person as much as it used to. Give it a generation, and the divvying-up of the sexes may seem as bizarre as racial segregation does now.

Or society could move in the opposite direction, and segregate everyone from everyone else.

So, the two options are either radical desegregation of male and female or radical segregation of everybody from everybody else! How about binary complementarity? It seems like that's a third option that's rapidly falling by the wayside. Now I'm not here primarily to lament our culture's moral decline but to give a positive presentation of what the Bible teaches on what it means to live as a man or women according to God's design. I've spent quite a bit of time on the culture, however, to help us realize that the Christian message on gender has become deeply countercultural in our society and will become so even more in the years to come.

It is my contention today that as Christians we have a continuing responsibility to witness to God's design for man and woman even and especially when this is countercultural. In order to do so, we must know what the biblical teaching is and must live it out in our marriages and families and in the church. Witnessing to God's design for man and woman, it is important to note, however, is not merely a burdensome obligation; the Bible's teaching on gender is good news for a confused culture. For those who are caught in the gender fluidity of being pansexual, transsexual, bisexual, or some other shade of gender, the Bible offers hope and a promise of concreteness that makes abiding by God's word in this as in every area of life enticingly attractive, profoundly satisfying, and reassuringly comforting. Rather tellingly, when I adapted the message I am sharing with you today from previous sermons and presentations I have given on this topic in the past, I didn't have to change the body of my message regarding the Bible's teaching on men and women: God's truth doesn't change! It stays the same in times of rapid societal ferment and decay; all that changes is the way in which we need to contextualize God's unchanging Word in our rapidly changing culture.

But before we turn to our biblical-theological survey, let's think for a moment: What are some of the ways in which the church is currently trying to address this topic and attempting to minister in this rather volatile context? How successful are we in balancing the ministry of truth and love? As followers of the one who is both "grace and truth," we are called to a ministry that speaks the truth in love. Yet it appears the balance between love and truth is not easily struck. Let me say first of all that there are some excellent examples of those who respond to contemporary gender issues effectively and insightfully, and who try to strike a proper balance. Albert Mohler and Russell Moore, in particular, come to mind and several others as well. Nevertheless, it seems that many veer to one side or the other on the spectrum between truth and love on this issue.

On the one hand are those who emphasize the church's need for compassion, understanding, and acceptance. Thus Wesley Hill, in a plenary address at last year's meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, a yearly gathering of evangelical professors, scholars, and pastors interested in the academic study of the Bible, argued that if as a Christian, you find within yourself a homosexual orientation, don't try to change but rather abstain from acting on those impulses and remain celibate. Deliverance will have to await the final state. (Personally, I

find the notion of the “gay Christian,” affirmed by Hill, rather problematic; a helpful little book in this regard is Sam Alberry’s, *Is God Anti-Gay?* For a counterpoint to Wesley Hill’s approach, see Denny Burk and Heath Lambert’s, *Transforming Sexuality*. Authors such as Preston Sprinkle in *People to Be Loved* (foreword Wesley Hill) and Sam Andreades in *Engendered* likewise focus primarily on the church’s need for compassion and understanding in dealing with those who are confused or conflicted regarding their gender identity. Mark Yarhouse has written a highly regarded book, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, on navigating transgender issues in a changing culture. Certainly, the church should repent of any ways in which it has been lacking in compassion or understanding toward those who are caught in this kind of suffering or confusion. At the same time, however, it is unloving to condone the sin of violating God’s design for man and woman for the sake of loving the sinner. True, biblical, Christlike love has a backbone; it rejoices with the truth. Loving affirmation should take place within the context of an acknowledgment of God-given boundaries. As a study of the Gospels shows, Jesus’ loving ministry had teeth; he spoke and acted with love that was grounded in clear, unequivocal, uncompromising truth.

On the other hand, of course, are those who teach biblical truth without sufficient concern for those who are caught in a homosexual orientation or confused or conflicted gender identity. While truth is spoken, this is not always done in love. Speaking for myself, as a lover of God’s truth in Scripture, and as a passionate student of God’s word, if anything, I tend to gravitate toward the “truth” side of the equation and need friends who minister to those who are hurting to show me how to balance truth with compassion. The people who struggle with these things may include our friends and loved ones. They often have suffered terribly in silence, and we need to be there to listen, to love, and to help them walk with Christ in the midst of such struggles.

In between these two sides accentuating love and truth, respectively, is a broad spectrum of responses that I can only touch on briefly this morning. What some of these responses have in common is that they may at least in part be motivated by an element of fear (or perhaps misguided zeal) in dealing with this issue, resulting in an accommodation of the culture and a muffling of the biblical message on gender. For example, there are some who affirm a complementarian position but in the midst of the cultural confusion find it increasingly unpopular to do so. As a result, they tend to minimize differences in gender roles, at least with regard to women in leadership, and emphasize mission and gospel unity. Some in this group espouse a minimalistic view of gender roles, affirming that men and women are essentially equal and that women may do anything men can do except for serving as senior pastor. They are reducing the difference in roles between men and women to a bare bones minimum, overlooking or choosing to ignore (or at least deemphasize) significant portions of Scripture. My concern is that this potential cultural accommodation and minimalism may cause the church to miss the deep truth and good news about the biblical teaching on gender. If we are afraid to talk about gender or avoid talking about it because of its implications for male-female roles, or reduce male-female differences to nothing but the right to occupy a singular office, how do we expect to teach our children what it means to be male and female? Minimalism on this issue out of fear or potential embarrassment effectively neuters gender, and by neutering gender we are losing an essential part of our identity. In fact, gender roles are the crucible in which God molds us and teaches us about what it means to follow Christ and to live for him in our marriages, our families, and in the church.

Let’s take a moment, though, to address the legitimate concern raised by “gender minimalists” in the church: Does God’s design for man and woman get in the way of church unity? How does this tension impact our mission? You can appreciate how it would be tempting to conclude that if we just don’t talk about this issue, it won’t have a negative impact on our mission. For this reason many embrace a concerted if not unilateral

focus on the Great Commission: what really matters is our mission to the lost and sharing the gospel of forgiveness and new life in Christ. Well, I'm certainly not going to say anything to detract from the importance of the Great Commission; I'm totally committed to help fulfill it in my small sphere of influence. My concern here is simply that this kind of approach may lead to superficiality when it comes to a robust understanding of the biblical teaching on gender. Often it's not so much what people are saying but what they're not saying, and it's not that people are saying anything unbiblical about gender but that they're not saying anything at all, or nothing biblical, which is really what's needed to counter the confusing messages sent incessantly in our culture. That's one of the possible outcomes of fear.

Others in this camp somewhere in the middle between focusing on truth or love advocate a big evangelical tent, subsuming God's design for man and woman under the core value of evangelical pluralism: what matters is unity, and, if anything, those who speak out with conviction on this topic are potentially divisive and divert the church from its primary mission of evangelism. Of course, the question here becomes: Just how big do we want our tent to be? Where does evangelical pluralism end? What are its boundaries? And is it wise to make God's design for man and woman simply a matter of evangelical pluralism? Is Scripture really so unclear about this issue that we must resort to a sort of truce in which we agree to disagree? Is it even practical to do so? Don't we have to take a position on what men's and women's roles in the church are biblically supposed to be? Or can we just sit on the fence or on the sidelines and have it both ways? And even if that were theoretically possible, would it be wise and truly beneficial for believers who want to experience all that God has for them as those he created male and female to neglect this important issue?

To stay on this topic for just another minute, perhaps the most noteworthy trend Margaret and I have witnessed in some churches, and parachurch organizations as well, is what you might call the "strategy of calculated silence." Whether by benign neglect or as part of a concerted, deliberate strategic decision, quite a few churches seem to no longer talk about God's design for man and woman very much at all. While such churches or organizations may pursue cultural engagement in the political realm or with regard to the general moral decline in society, they do not do so specifically in a way that integrates God's design for man and woman into a larger, holistic strategy of engagement. Witness, it seems, is limited to a central gospel core, and "non-essential" aspects such as God's design are relegated, not only to the periphery, but to oblivion altogether.

Perhaps it is at least in part because of such silence that God's judgment has come upon us in the West in form of gender confusion and radical erosion of gender identity. Perhaps the vacuum of the church's speaking out with conviction on God's design for man and woman has hastened the demise of the biblical teaching on gender in our culture. To be sure, the issues are complex, but one thing is certain: God's design for man and woman is an integral part of our existence as believers here on earth and as such we need to pay close attention to it and model it and make it an important part of our witness. In fact, God designed marriage and family in such a way that they bear witness to his divine design, which is not only good and wise but also attractive and appealing once people understood it truly for what it is.

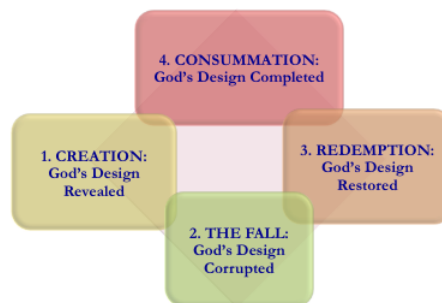
Now let me be clear about one thing before I go on: No one gets saved by believing in the biblical teaching on men's and women's roles. The biblical teaching on gender is not the gospel. But who we are as men and women is more important than one would assume from hearing very little about it in many of our churches and there's more at stake than many of us realize. Ironically, the gospel that we preach is centered on a bridegroom and his bride.

There may be one other reason why many in the church are silent on this issue: they may be turned off by culture war and inflammatory rhetoric. When my wife and I wrote our book *God's Design for Man and Woman*, we sensed that many had gotten tired of the polemic that surrounded the issue in evangelical circles. Too often the issue was dealt with in form of a debate with detailed rejoinders and counter-rebuttals. Polemics and partisan politics turned off the younger generation, our children's generation that was looking for a more positive, constructive way of living out their gender identities and roles.

What Margaret and I have found as we've studied Scripture both individually and together as a couple, and as we've taught it to others, including our own children, is that the Bible's teaching on this as on any subject is coherent and consistent. We've found that there are two broad, pervasive patterns in Scripture, one affirming male leadership, the other affirming male-female partnership. God in Christ came to save representatives of both genders; both men and women are sinful, yet both are precious and worthy and have equal dignity; God's project of salvation thus upholds the preciousness of men and women, but does so not in the context of gender sameness but of gender difference and complementarity. Those of us who have a high view of Scripture and are prepared to submit to its authority; those of us who espouse a responsible hermeneutic and interpret Scripture in keeping with the authors' original intent can expect the Bible to speak to us with clarity and compelling consistency on the topic of God's design for man and woman.

God's creation purpose, therefore, is not a battle of the sexes as feminists believe but one of harmony, unity of purpose, and loving collaboration. The Fall introduced a struggle for control, pain, and toil in our relationships. But God's purpose in redemption is the restoration of the male-female relationship to his original design in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Ephesians, in particular, we see that it is God's purpose in these final days to bring all things back together under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glory (1:10); that as men and women are filled with the Spirit, they are enabled once again to live out God's design for man and woman the way he intended it in the first place (5:18); and that as we put on the full armor of God, we will be able to withstand the devil's assault on God's plan for us and on our marriage relationship and our families rather than allowing him to wreak havoc as he did in the Garden (6:10). In this way, we see the Bible canvass a biblical-theological movement from creation and the fall to redemption and consummation in Christ, and gender is an important part of the biblical story.

God's Design for Man & Woman



In the time that remains, then, I'd like to talk to you about a clear and concise way of communicating God's design for man and woman in Scripture so you can share it effectively with others, tracing the four redemptive movements in the Bible: creation, the fall, redemption, and consummation: (1) Creation: God's Design Revealed; (2) The Fall: God's Design Corrupted; (3) Redemption: God's Design Restored; (4)

Consummation: God's Design Completed. In addition to *God's Design for Man and Woman*, you may also want to consult my earlier book, *God, Marriage & Family* (now in its second edition), or the abridged version *Marriage & the Family*, for a fuller presentation. This is the truth we must convey to those to whom we minister in love.

(1) Creation: God's Design Revealed

We'll pick up the story at Gen 1:26-31, which says,

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion ... over all the earth"

²⁷So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion ..." ³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

So we see that God made humanity male and female (not transgender); that he created them to be fruitful and multiply (something same-sex couples cannot truly be); and that he made the man and the woman in his image, that is, in his likeness, as his missionaries and representatives, and put them in charge of this earth to manage and populate it for him and his glory.

Genesis 1 talks about God's creation of humanity in general. Then, in Genesis 2, we get a close-up view of God's creation of first the man, from the ground (a word play in the original Hebrew: man = *adam*, ground = *adamah*), and then the woman, from the man and for the man (Hebrew *ishah* = woman, *ish* = man). In Gen 2:7, we read:

⁷The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. ...

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ... ¹⁸Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ... ²¹So 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. ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then 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."

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

So we see that God made the man to be the leader and to bear primary responsibility for the marriage relationship before God. And he made the woman to be compatible and corresponding to the man. As I mentioned, you could summarize God's design for man and woman this way: "Male leadership, male-female

partnership.” And we see that in God’s plan, gender and sex are one and the same, and gender distinctions are fixed, not fluid. We see how in marriage, two people become one flesh, one family. There is unity, there is harmony, and there is intimacy: the man and the woman are naked and not ashamed.

(2) The Fall: God’s Design Corrupted

The Bible tells us that the man’s and the woman’s marital bliss, uninterrupted by sin, didn’t last very long. One day, you know the story, the tempter, Satan, approached the woman and lured her into sin. She didn’t check with her husband, and he was either not around or if he was did nothing to stop her. In fact, she acted as the leader, and he followed her into sin! So what we see is that the devil subverted the male-female relationship. No longer was the man leading and the woman serving as his loving, intelligent, corresponding counterpart. The woman was now the leader, and the man had become her follower.

As we’ve seen, this is diametrically opposite God’s design where the man is the leader and the woman his responsive, loving partner. The results were disastrous. God’s image in humanity was distorted. The male-female relationship had now become a struggle for control. Among other things, what ensued were polygamy, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, and even death. Still, we see that leaders in Old Testament times were virtually all men: national deliverers such as Moses, Joshua, and the so-called Judges, the kings of Israel (with one exception, Athaliah in 2 Kings 11, not a positive example), and the Levite priests.

Things were somewhat different with regard to prophets, because prophets don’t have institutional authority. Prophets don’t command authority personally but serve as spokespersons directly for God and command obedience not to themselves but to God and his Word. Nevertheless, all writing prophets whose words were included in Scripture were men. And throughout the Old Testament, we see that humanity is looking forward to a Redeemer who will save people from their sins, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that Messiah was male as well, even though he, of course, came to save all people, both men and women. In all these ways, God reaffirmed his original pattern of male leadership for humanity.

At the same time, we see many inspiring female characters in the Old Testament that I can mention here only briefly in summary: wives such as Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel; prophetesses such as Deborah, Huldah, and Miriam; godly women such as Abigail, Ruth, and Esther; and many other significant women such as Hannah the mother of the prophet Samuel who served as the precursor of none other than Mary, the mother of Jesus, which is shown in that Mary’s hymn of praise in Luke chapter 1 contains several allusions to and echoes of Hannah’s similar hymn in the first chapter of 1 Samuel.

Margaret and I spent quite a bit of time studying many of these women in Scripture, and we found that usually their significance comes from the way in which they are related to the messianic line and God’s purposes in salvation history. For example, Ruth was David’s great-grandmother; Esther was used by God to save Israel from extinction, which would also have meant the end of the messianic promise. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel were mothers of patriarchs; and so on. This has important implications for us today: our lives count as we are centrally related to what God is doing in this world and as we join him on his mission.

(3) Redemption: God’s Design Restored

We’ve seen God’s design at creation, and we’ve witnessed the consequences of the Fall on the male-female relationship. So how does redemption in Christ affect marriage and the family? How does the cross impact God’s design for man and woman? In short, redemption in Christ restores male-female harmony and unity, but it does not erase or reverse the original twin pattern of male leadership and male-female partnership.

Some argue that redemption in Christ did away with male leadership in marriage because “in Christ there is no male and female” (Gal 3:28). Those evangelical feminists believe that male leadership is merely a result of the Fall but that God’s original design was egalitarian. According to them, in Christ male-female relationships are restored to their original egalitarian design. So what’s our response?

Let me suggest to you that there are at least three problems with this view. (1) It conflicts with Old Testament teaching. (2) It is at odds with the teaching and practice of Jesus; and (3) It also conflicts with the teaching and practice of the apostle Paul.

(1) It conflicts with Old Testament teaching. As we’ve seen, Genesis 2 and 3 make clear that God created the man first and made him the leader and then created the woman to come alongside him as his corresponding partner. There is a sense, then, in which the roles of the man and the woman are irreversible and not interchangeable, not only after the Fall, but also prior to the Fall, at the very beginning, in the way in which the man and the woman were created by God.

(2) The evangelical feminist position also conflicts with the teaching and practice of Jesus. In the Gospels, we see that Jesus, while treating women with great dignity and respect, appointed twelve men to be his apostles, his core leadership group of what would become the New Testament church. Evangelical feminists attempt to counter this by saying Jesus simply chose twelve men because his contemporaries weren’t ready for women leaders or cite some other temporary, merely cultural rationale. But Margaret (who wrote her doctoral dissertation on the subject) and I would respond that Jesus frequently broke social customs such as when he fraternized with tax collectors and “sinners” or when he talked publicly and at length with the Samaritan woman. It’s unlikely that he would have compromised his convictions and accommodated himself to the culture if an important principle (such as male-female equality) had been at stake. Instead, his selection of twelve men as apostles is surely significant with regard to his position on men as spiritual leaders. Even the number twelve establishes a conscious connection between the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel, continuing the pattern of male leadership.

(3) The idea that male authority is simply a matter resulting from the Fall also conflicts with the practice and teaching of Paul (we develop this at some length in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of *God’s Design for Man and Woman*). Like Jesus, Paul appointed men as church leaders, the so-called “Pauline circle.” With regard to the role of women in the church, he taught in 1 Timothy chapter 2,

¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man ... ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived ...

(I don’t have time to get into the specifics of interpreting 1 Tim 2:12 this morning. If you’re interested in exploring the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 in greater detail, I would highly recommend a book Tom Schreiner and I co-edited, *Women in the Church*, with many high-quality contributors, now in its third edition; the third edition, in particular, provides a very compelling defense of the natural reading of 1 Timothy 2 and a sound refutation of the egalitarian interpretation).

With regard to the home, Paul taught that women should be submissive to their husbands and that husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church (Eph 5:21–33; Col 3:18–19; Titus 2:3–5). So we see that the New Testament is clear that redemption in Christ does not mean returning to an egalitarian pre-Fall relationship but a restoration to God’s original design where the man is the loving, sacrificial, Christlike leader

and the woman his devoted partner and the two are united in serving God together in their joint mission for God and in raising children who love and serve God as well.

(4) Consummation: God's Design Completed

Finally, we see Paul teaching that it is God's plan of the ages to restore all things under Christ's rule and headship. In Eph 1:7–10, we read,

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to bring all things back together under his headship [authority], things in heaven and things on earth.

So Christ's death on the cross is just the beginning; it's not the end. All of creation is moving toward the final state when Christ will rule over all humanity, male and female. You see, contrary to many feminists, authority is not bad in and of itself; what's bad is the corruption and abuse of authority. Authority itself is good, and necessary, if exercised in keeping with God's purposes.

Then later in the book of Ephesians, we see that this bringing of all things back together under one head, Christ, also encompasses the male-female relationship. Marriage is not the ultimate focal point, Christ is. So while marriage is very important, our focus should not be on marriage or romance in and of itself but on serving Christ together as joint disciples, as men and women committed to his lordship and supreme authority. As we serve him and submit to him, we will honor him and glorify him, and we will be a blessing to others and ourselves be blessed. Also, as Jesus taught, in heaven there will be no more marriage and we will all be like the angels (Matt 22:30) and will all be jointly related to him as his bride. As mentioned, Revelation 19 uses the marriage supper of the Lamb as a symbolic way of depicting the consummation of the union between Christ and the church. Also, the book of Revelation contains several references to the 24 elders, made up of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, together depicting symbolically the leadership of God's people in both Old and New Testament times. This serves as a capstone of the scriptural teaching regarding the God-intended male pattern of leadership which pervades the entire biblical story.

Conclusion and Application

So we've seen that God at creation designed the male-female relationship with the man as the loving leader and the woman as his responsive, intelligent partner. We saw that at the Fall roles were reversed, with the woman as the leader and the man following her into sin. The result was a struggle for control between the man and the woman, something that is still with us because even as Christians we still have a sinful nature. But we also saw that God's plan in Christ is to bring all things, including the marriage relationship, back together under his headship and authority. This means that as we are filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), and as we put on the full armor of God (Eph 6:10–18), we can once again live out our relationships in increasing harmony and unity rather than trying to manipulate and control the other person and using them to meet our own needs. In this life, we'll be able to experience God's ideal only imperfectly, but one day, when history is consummated, we will spend eternity with him and with one another in perfect harmony. I'm sure we all look forward to that day.

Let me close with a challenge. Trusting in God's Word means not only believing something in our heads but living it out in our actions. Let's do what God's Word says! Margaret and I have met too many Christians who claimed to be submitted to God's Word and to Christ's lordship but when it came to God's design for

man and woman, they chose to do just about anything they wanted, whatever was convenient, whatever they felt like, often rationalizing their actions. That's unacceptable.

I started out my message by telling you about disturbing trends in the general culture. It's always good to be vigilant and discerning and to realize what's behind many of the cultural trends in our day: a rebellion against God's very good, wise, and abiding design for men and women. Many of the trends we're witnessing today are really not new, because in many ways we see the same sinful expressions already in the first century when the New Testament Scriptures were written (see esp. Romans 1). People are still sinners in need of salvation. Nothing has fundamentally changed in the human condition. For this reason the Bible is profoundly relevant in our day just as when it was first written.

You and I won't be able to save the general culture from sinking deeper and deeper into the moral morass it's already in. We may not be able to stop the cultural slide into confusion, but God has called us to live in witness at this particular moment, and we have good news, and this includes good news about gender. This is good news that the culture desperately needs to hear, news from which people without Christ will greatly benefit. We can be a stable island in a sea of turmoil where people can find a place of rest and an anchor for their souls. Are we speaking the truth in love? Are we speaking the truth at all? In an age when people are reaping the benefits of social community at church but are not willing to surrender themselves to the truth of the Bible in this area, are we willing to speak up? And are we living out the truth? God's design for man and woman is good news; let's preach it, and let's live it joyfully and winsomely, unafraid and unashamed.

As I said at the beginning, our ministry must be grounded in biblical truth but conveyed in a spirit of love. This is not just an academic issue. Marny and I have four children, two sons and two daughters. What do we want our daughters to experience in the men they marry? And how do we want our sons to treat women?

I continue to be proud of the young man I mentor at NC State and asked him a few questions along these lines last Friday. He told me about a recent conversation he had with one of the guys he knows who asked him about the "ladies" in his life. He responded that he only needed one lady, the one he was going to marry. Still, the other guy persisted: When was he going to make "his move"? He replied that he was going to wait to have sex until he gets married. "But why?" his friend asked. He told him that he was striving for purity, out of love for God and also to protect himself and others from getting hurt. He told me that, as a Christian, he is often made fun of; having biblical standards in this area can be embarrassing and countercultural. But he is not just focused on himself and being on the defensive. As he has the opportunity, he tries to be a faithful friend and lovingly confronts those who claim to be Christians yet don't live like it. He told me that he focuses on the heart rather than on the sin. He tries to speak the truth in love and to show how abiding by God's design holds out hope and is terrific news especially for young people.

What else can he do? Here are a few other subjects we explored. He can live out the good news of God's design by how he treats women. He can accept responsibility for protecting women in a way that is appropriate for the occasion and for treating them well, not in a way that is demeaning but one that is sacrificial and affirms their dignity. He can refuse to be controlled by the culture but instead be a principled leader. How can he speak, and model, truth in love? On a hall where sexual immorality is rampant, he can steer clear of the use of pornography and refuse to participate in the objectification of women. He can advocate honoring women and upholding their dignity. This takes courage and in many ways is countercultural on a college campus. Rather than sleeping around irresponsibly and carelessly, and rate girls as "1s" or "0s" depending on whether or not they are willing to have sex, he can prepare to be a godly husband

and father and to equip the next generation. All of this sends a strong message to his peers and to girls as well.

While we may not be able to stop the moral decline in our culture, we can control how we live out the teaching on gender in God's word in our families and communities and how we mentor our children. So let's focus on what we can control. Let's tell people the gospel of forgiveness and salvation in Christ. And let's remember that one important way in which we can flesh out this gospel is by the way in which we live out God's design in our marriages and our families. As Paul says in his letter to Titus, let's strive to "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" in the surrounding culture, and let's be faithful to testify to the whole gospel both in season and out of season. May God bless you and your family and your church as you serve him and as you live out this important entailment of the gospel.

Andreas J. Köstenberger, October 18, 2016