

Marriage and the Family
in the New Testament

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The following survey will take its point of departure from the biblical creation account. The first topic of discussion is that of homo- versus heterosexuality. This is followed by treatments of the New Testament teaching on marital roles: divorce, remarriage, singleness, and children and parenting. The importance of marriage and the family in church leadership and the issue of spiritual warfare as it relates to marriage and the family are briefly addressed as well. The conclusion sets forth the distinctness of the Christian understanding of the subject.

ROOTED IN CREATION

In his chapter on marriage and the family in ancient Israel, Daniel Block has demonstrated that the creation narrative presents the husband and wife relationship simultaneously in terms of ontological equality and functional complementarity.¹ By way of background to the present chapter it will therefore suffice to briefly summarize his contribution. As pointing to ontological equality, Block lists the following observations: (1) the reference to man being created in the image and likeness of God as both male and female in Genesis 1:27 (cf. 1 Cor 11:7);² (2) the joint

¹ See “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel” above. One New Testament passage that holds these two aspects in tension is 1 Pet 3:7 where the woman is referred to both as the man’s “fellow heir of the grace of life” and as the “weaker vessel” (NASB).

² The (roughly synonymous) Hebrew terms used in Gen 1:26–27 are *tselem* for “image” (in the sense of “replica,” cf. Num. 33:42; 1 Sam 6:5, 11; 2 Kgs 11:18; Ezek 7:27; 16:17; 23:14) and *demût* for “likeness” (in the sense of “resemblance,” cf. 2 Kgs 16:10; 2 Chr 4:3–4; Ps 58:4; Ezek 23:15; see also Gen 5:3; 9:6; and Jas 3:9). Most likely creation in God’s image conveys the (functional) notion of representative rule by way of procreation, as seems to be borne out by the immediately following divine command for the man and the woman to be fruitful and multiply, and to fill the earth and subdue it, and to rule (Gen 1:28). See the survey of the three major positions on what it means to be created in God’s image in Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998), pp. 520–29 and 532–34: (1) substantive (Luther, Calvin, and more recently Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994], pp. 445–49); (2) relational (Barth, Brunner); and (3) functional (several Reformed scholars; Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986], esp. pp. 72–73, favors a combination of (2) and (3), with (3) being primary). For the ancient background see esp. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), p. 160, followed by William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 83 and passim. See also G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 70.

stewardship of creation expressed by plural pronouns and verbs in Genesis 1:28; (3) the expression ‘*ēzer k^enegdô* (suitable helper) in Genesis 2:18; (4) the woman’s creation from the man’s rib rather than his head or feet (Gen 2:22); (5) the man’s recognition of the woman as his female counterpart in Genesis 2:23; and (6) the mutuality of the marital relationship conveyed in Genesis 2:24–25.

At the same time, Block observes indications of a “functional ordering” in the creation narrative’s presentation of the male-female relationship. He names the following factors: (1) the man and the woman’s consecutive (rather than simultaneous) creation (cf. 1 Tim 2:13); (2) the woman’s creation to meet a deficiency in the man experience (rather than vice versa; cf. 1 Cor 11:9); (3) the woman’s creation from the man (rather than the man’s from the woman; cf. 1 Cor 11:8, 12); (4) the woman’s presentation by God to the man (rather than vice versa); (5) the record of the man’s response to the creation of the woman but not the woman’s to the creation of the man; and (6) the woman’s being named by the man (rather than the man being named by the woman), and the woman’s name being derivative of the man’s.³

While it would be possible to add to the above list,⁴ or to register certain differences of opinion,⁵ these observations suffice to lay the groundwork for the following discussion of the New Testament teaching on marriage and the family.⁶

HOMOSEXUALITY VERSUS HETEROSEXUALITY

Before turning to a discussion of marriage and the family, a few comments on the issue of homosexuality are in order.⁷ The major source concerning the New Testament’s view of

³ As indicated, the apostle Paul explicitly makes the first three points in his writings. For a succinct summary of didactic passages in Paul regarding women based on the Old Testament teaching see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Women in the Pauline Mission,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), pp. 236–37. On the authority implied by the woman’s naming by the man see James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), pp. 210–12.

⁴ Cf. Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), pp. 95–112.

⁵ Such as that the expression ‘*ēzer k^enegdô* (suitable helper) in Gen 2:18 denotes not merely ontological equality but also functional complementarity, that is, the woman’s subordination to the man in her role as “helper” (note that the man is never called the woman’s “helper”). This, incidentally, is not mitigated by the fact that the term ‘*zer* is repeatedly applied to God in the Old Testament (cf. Ex 18:4; Ps 20:3; 33:20; 70:6; 115:9–11; 121:1–2; 146:4). For these passages refer to God’s voluntary “submission” to meet human needs without necessary ontological implications. In the male-female relationship, likewise, it is not ontology but functional distinctions that are in view.

⁶ On the importance of the Old Testament teaching on marriage and the family for understanding the teaching of the New Testament see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Gender Passages in the New Testament: Hermeneutical Fallacies Critiqued,” *WTJ* 56 (1994): 267–71. Note also the warning against efforts to interpret the Genesis creation narrative independently and apart from the apostolic interpretation of a given Old Testament passage in *ibid.*, p. 271, n. 45.

⁷ The following discussion of homosexuality is adapted from my forthcoming commentary on the Pastoral epistles

homosexuality is the apostle Paul, who uses the term *arsenokoitēs* (not previously attested) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 and refers to homosexuality in an important passage in Romans 1:27. The expression means literally “one who lies or sleeps with males,” that is, those who engage in homosexual acts.⁸ The term probably harks back to the proscription of homosexuality in the Levitical code (Lev 18:22; 20:13 LXX).⁹ Wright calls it “that homoerotic vice which Jewish writers like Philo, Josephus, Paul and Ps-Phocylides regarded as a signal token of pagan Greek depravity.”¹⁰

Some have sought to restrict the application of the term to male prostitution¹¹ or pederasty.¹² It has also been argued that the expression refers merely to homosexual acts, not to “celibate” homosexual relationships (that is, relationships between persons with a homosexual orientation who are in a relationship but do not have sexual relations). Moreover, it has been alleged that the New Testament pertains merely to the negative dehumanizing pattern of homosexuality prevalent in first-century Hellenistic culture and that it therefore cannot be applied directly to contemporary mutually consenting, non-exploitative homosexual relationships.

In response, however, it must be pointed out, first, that *arsenokoitēs* is a broad term that cannot be confined to specific instances of homosexual activity such as male prostitution or pederasty. This is in keeping with the term’s Old Testament background where lying with a “male” (a very general term) is proscribed, relating to “every kind of male-male intercourse.”¹³ In fact, the Old Testament “bans every type of homosexual intercourse,” not just male prostitution or intercourse with youths. “Homosexual intercourse where both parties consent is also condemned.”¹⁴ Moreover, while it is true that homosexual *acts* are the specific focus in the Pauline prohibitions, this does not mean that he would have considered “celibate” homosexual relationships as within the scope of the divine creative will; for this would be to exchange a man’s

in the New Expositor’s Bible Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan). For a helpful treatment, see Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Leicester; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

⁸This is brought out by the NIV rendering “homosexual offenders” in 1 Cor 6:9 and perhaps even better in the TNIV’s “practicing homosexuals”; the NIV translation “pervert” in 1 Tim 1:10 unduly dilutes the homosexual nature of the perversion addressed there (but note the commendable change to “those practicing homosexuality” in the TNIV).

⁹Cf. Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 88, 101.

¹⁰David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes?” *VC* 38 (1984): 145; see also idem, “Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible,” *EvQ* 61 (1989): 291–300; and Richard B. Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” *JRE* 14 (1986): 184–215.

¹¹John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), esp. 106–7, 335–53, decisively refuted by Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes?”; see also idem, “Translating ἄρσενόκοιται (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10),” *VC* 41 (1987): 397.

¹²Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); but see the critique in Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural,” pp. 210–11; and Quinn and Wacker, *First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 88; see also the helpful summary and refutation of Boswell, Scroggs, and Petersen by James B. De Young, “The Source and NT Meaning of ἄρσενόκοιται with Implications for Christian Ethics and Ministry,” *MSJ* 3 (1992): 191–214 (apparently unaware of Wright, “Translating *Arsenokoitai*”).

¹³Gordon J. Wenham, “The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality,” *ExpTim* 102 (1991): 362.

“natural” function for what is “unnatural”:

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged *natural* relations for *unnatural* ones. In the same way the men also abandoned *natural* relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.¹⁵

As the above passage shows, the apostle Paul considers homosexuality to be “unnatural,” that is, contrary to the way God has ordained things to function according to creation order.¹⁶ This is borne out also by the Genesis narrative, which not only affirms repeatedly that God made every creature “after its kind” (Gen 1:21, 24, and so on) but also makes clear that God complemented the man, not by creating another man, but by creating a woman. It is intrinsic to creation that God made man “male and female,” and it is together that they reflect the divine image (Gen 1:27). This is not mollified by a mere denial that Paul in Romans speaks of homosexuality at large or by erecting a distinction between homosexual acts and homosexual orientation; that homosexuality is not in conflict with God’s creation design can be maintained only by a decided rejection of the biblical creation account itself. Demonstrably, in the context of Genesis 1–2 there is no place for homosexuality in that it is not even potentially procreative and thus stands outside God’s creative purposes of making humankind in two sexes in order to “be fruitful and multiply.”¹⁷

MARITAL ROLES

Old Testament foundations. The divine institution of marriage is recorded in the foundational narrative of Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (NIV). As Stott notes, this implies that the marriage union is: (1) exclusive (“a man . . . his wife”); (2) publicly acknowledged (“leave his father and mother”); (3) permanent (“be united to his wife”); and (4) normally consummated by sexual intercourse (“become one flesh”).¹⁸ On the basis of Genesis 2:24, Stott provides the following biblical definition of marriage: “Marriage is an exclusive heterosexual covenant between one man and one woman, ordained and sealed by God, preceded by a public leaving of parents, consummated in sexual union, issuing in a permanent mutually supportive partnership, and normally crowned by the gift of children.”¹⁹ Despite occasional instances of polygamy, Israel’s

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Rom 1:26–27 NIV, emphasis added; cf. 1 Cor 6:9–10.

¹⁶ Cf. D. F. Wright, “Homosexuality,” in *DPL*, pp. 413–14, who notes that “unnatural” does not simply mean “contrary to accepted practice” but “the flouting of sexual distinctions basic to God’s creative design” (p. 413).

¹⁷ Wenham, “Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality,” p. 363; Craig S. Keener, “Adultery, Divorce,” *DNTB*, p. 15, comments that ancient Jews “usually viewed homosexual behavior as a pervasively and uniquely Gentile sin” and “regarded homosexual behavior as meriting death,” noting also that “some Jewish people regarded homosexual intercourse as unnatural . . . , probably in part because it could not contribute to procreation.”

¹⁸ John R. W. Stott, “Marriage and Divorce,” in *Involvement: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1984), 2:163.

¹⁹ Ibid. From a church-historical perspective, see also the interesting treatise entitled “On the Good of Marriage” by

history generally presupposes the divinely ordained institution of monogamous marriage.²⁰

Jesus. Jesus, when questioned about divorce, affirmed the permanent nature of marriage in no uncertain terms. Quoting both foundational Old Testament texts, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, he concluded, “So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mt 19:6 NIV). As Stott aptly notes, “The marriage bond is more than a human contract: it is a divine yoke. And the way in which God lays this yoke upon a married couple is not by creating a kind of mystical union but by declaring his purpose in his Word.”²¹

While Jesus affirmed marriage and blessed children, however, he conceived of the community of believers in familial terms transcending those of people’s natural relations. This is one of the most striking, distinctive, and central aspects of Jesus’ call to discipleship.²² Leaving one’s family behind, even literally, was regularly expected of Jesus’ first followers. This is made clear by what is perhaps the earliest account of Jesus’ calling of his disciples in Mark’s Gospel:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. When they had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.²³

Conversely, those who resist Jesus’ call to discipleship frequently are unwilling to forsake their natural ties in favor of total allegiance to Jesus. Luke records a series of three such memorable instances:

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Augustine written around A.D. 400 (*NPNF*, 2:397–413). Attitudes to sexuality, marriage, and family in the patristic period are chronicled by Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990).

²⁰ Craig S. Keener, “Marriage,” *DNTB*, p. 683, notes that in early Judaism “the vast majority of Jewish men and all Jewish women were monogamous” and that some conservative sectarians forbade polygamy.

²¹ Stott, “Marriage and Divorce,” p. 167. On ancient Jewish marriage and weddings, see Keener, “Marriage,” *DNTB*, pp. 684–86.

²² Note the conclusion by Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 56, that there is “strong precedent for the apparent ‘hostility’ to family in the context of discipleship of Jesus found in the gospels,” pointing to Judaism from the story of Abraham onwards, the renunciation of family life at Qumran (as idealized by Philo and Josephus), and the communities of Therapeutae (Philo). But see the perceptive review and critique by John Barclay, “Review of *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* by Stephen C. Barton,” *SCE* 9, no. 1 (1996): 47–50.

²³ Mk 1:16–20 NIV = Mt 4:18–22; cf. Lk 5:2–11.

Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”²⁴

All three Gospels also record a rich young man’s unwillingness to part with his wealth in order to follow Jesus, setting his refusal in contrast to the disciples’ unconditional commitment to their Master.²⁵ Upon Peter’s remark that he and his fellow disciples have left everything to follow him, Jesus responds with the promise that “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mk 10:29–31 [NIV] par.).

Jesus himself set the example by repeatedly renouncing his own natural family ties where they potentially stood in conflict with higher spiritual loyalties. Thus the twelve year-old Jesus retorted to his parents’ anguished concern, “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49 NIV). Later, Jesus rebukes, first his mother, and then his brothers for failing to understand the divine timing underlying his ministry (John 2:4; 7:6–8). Again, he refused to be drawn back into the confines of his natural relations when his concerned family went to take charge of him, fearing that the strains of his busy ministry had caused him to lose his mind. When told that his family was waiting for him outside, he queried in a dramatic gesture, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And answering his own question, looking at those seated in a circle around him, he issued the weighty pronouncement, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mk 3:20–21, 31–35 [NIV] par.). In due course, it appears that Jesus’ mother and his brothers indeed acknowledged that they, too, must subordinate their familial claims to allegiance to Jesus as their Savior and Lord.²⁶

Examples could be multiplied (such as Jesus’ response to the woman who called the mother who gave him birth and nursed him blessed in Lk 11:27–28), but the implications are clear. Rather than preaching a gospel urging believers to “focus on the family”²⁷—though obviously family has a vital place in God’s purposes for humanity—Jesus places natural kinship ties into the larger context of the kingdom of God.²⁸ In keeping with Old Testament prediction, he has come, not to bring peace, but a sword, “to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a

²⁴ Lk 9:57–60 NIV; cf. Mt 8:19–22.

²⁵ Mk 10:17–31 = Mt 19:16–30 = Lk 18:18–30.

²⁶ E.g., Acts 1:14; but see already Lk 1:46–47. James Francis’s calling (in an otherwise excellent article) Acts 1:14 “a reaffirmation of family ties” strikes me as rather curious (“Children and Childhood in the New Testament,” in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Barton [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996], p. 81).

²⁷ Cf. Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Leicester/Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), and the critique in Stephen C. Barton, “Biblical Hermeneutics and the Family,” in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 10–16; as well as Nicholas Peter Harvey, “Christianity against and for the Family,” *SCE* 9, no. 1 (1996): 34–39, and the response by Linda Woodhead in *SCE* 9, no. 1 (1996): 40–46.

²⁸ Cf. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties*.

daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (Mt 10:34–36 NIV). Thus, “If anyone does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26 NIV).²⁹

In sum, then, Jesus’ teaching on natural family ties relativizes their significance and places them within the larger context of God’s kingdom. Thus he lays the groundwork for Paul’s teaching that “from now on those who have wives should live as if they had none . . . for this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor 7:29, 31 NIV). Marriage, while remaining the foundational divine institution for humanity, is therefore not to be viewed as an end in itself, but as properly subordinated to God’s larger salvific purposes. The culmination of this development will be reached in the eternal state where people will no longer marry but be like angels (Mt 22:30 par.). Many of the implications of Jesus’ teachings on marriage and the family are further developed in the writings of Paul.

Paul. Of the New Testament writers it is Paul who elaborates on the nature of marriage in most detail. While he elsewhere extols the benefits of singleness, at least in certain circumstances (1 Cor 7; see further below), the same apostle has also provided us with the most extensive New Testament passage on marital roles (Eph 5:21–33; par. Col 3:18–19).³⁰ Rather than approaching this passage merely on a topical level, in order to appreciate its full import, one must understand it in the context of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians as a whole.³¹ The divine purpose is set squarely in an eschatological framework in the banner verse of the entire epistle: “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head [*anakephalaiōsasthai*], even Christ” (Eph 1:10). This establishes *Christ* as the focal point of God’s end-time program, and more particularly, Christ *as head* (Eph 1:22), not only over the church (Eph 1:22), but over every authority, in the present as well as the coming age (Eph 1:21). Clearly, Christ’s headship here conveys the notion of supreme authority, not merely that of provision or nurture, as is sometimes alleged.³² As the exalted Lord, Christ is the head (*kephalē*), and all things are subjected to him (*hypotassō*; cf. Phil 2:9–11).

Believers once were in the realm of Satan, but now they have been made alive in Christ, by grace (Eph 2:5). They have been raised and exalted *with him*, participating in his victory over

²⁹ Cf. Mt 10:37: “loves his father or mother/son or daughter *more* than me.”

³⁰ For a discussion of 1 Thess 4:3–8 and 1 Cor 7, including bibliographic references to the New Testament teaching on marriage up to 1985, see O. Larry Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles: Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul*, SBLDS 80 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), esp. pp. 65–125.

³¹ See also the interesting recent discussion of Eph 5 by Francis Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 183–259. Watson keenly observes that both viewing Ephesians 5 as “a legitimation of patriarchal marriage” and claiming that it “transforms patriarchal marriage by subjecting it to the criterion of love” simplify the passage by ignoring its complexities (ibid., p. 229, n. 6), referring to Ben Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 156; Sarah J. Tanzer, “Ephesians,” in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2: *A Feminist Commentary*, ed. E. Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 325–48, esp. 341.

³² For Christ is not the *source* of demons, but their *head*. Contra Catherine Clark Kroeger, “Head,” in *DPL*, pp. 375–77; see the critique by Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of κεφαλή (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence,

Satan (Eph 2:6). God's end-time plan to bring together all things in and under Christ is nowhere more evident than in his inclusion of the Gentiles in the community of believers together with believing Jews (Eph 2:11–22; 3:6).³³ This is termed by Paul a salvation-historical *mystērion*,³⁴ hidden in the past in God's own purposes, but now brought into the open and unpacked by the apostle himself. As he comes to the close of his elaboration of believers' spiritual blessings in Christ in the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul prays for all believers that Christ would live in their hearts by faith and that, rooted and established in love, they would know the love of Christ in their lives (Eph 3:17, 19).

The second half of the epistle is given to an exposition of the new life in Christ that believers are to enjoy in the unity of the "body of Christ," the church. They are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling, give preference to one another in love, and preserve spiritual unity in peace (Eph 4:1–3). In fact, the church has a sevenfold unity (Eph 4:4–6). God has given spiritual gifts and instituted various ministries in the church to equip believers for ministry of their own. In all this, his goal is the "perfect man" (*andra teleion*, Eph 4:13), who speaks the truth in love and in all things grows into him, who is the head, that is, Christ (Eph 4:13–16). Paul then contrasts the old with the new life-style: the old life-style was independent, unsubmitted, rebellious, defying authority, in bondage to passions and lusts; the new life-style is submitted, respectful of authority, and living in love. Becoming a Christian is like putting off old clothes and putting on new ones (Eph 4:22, 24; cf. Col 3:9–10): there must be a marked, noticeable change in spirit and behavior.

Moving to the more immediate context of the passage on marital roles, Paul exhorts believers to live lives of love, as Christ loved them. What kind of love did Christ show for believers? He gave himself as a sacrifice for them (Eph 5:1–2; cf. 5:25). Conversely, there must be no sexual immorality (*porneia*; cf. 1 Cor 6:15–16). As God's eschatological community, the church must be filled with the Spirit (which means that every believer must be likewise so filled; Eph 5:18). This corresponds to God's filling of the Old Testament sanctuary with his spiritual presence.³⁵ In the first instance, this Spirit filling refers to congregational worship (and is thus corporate, rather than merely individualistic, in import; Eph 5:19–20).³⁶ Still continuing the same sentence in the original Greek, Paul then relates Spirit filling also to the marriage relationship in Eph 5:21–24. Being properly submitted (*hypotassō*, Eph 5:21, 22) is thus a mark of Spirit-filling, in contrast to

Real and Alleged," *JETS* 44 (2001): 25–65.

³³ Note that Gentiles comprise the majority of Paul's readership in Ephesians.

³⁴ The usual English translation of this expression by "mystery" is somewhat misleading in that "mystery" is at best a partial cognate of the Greek term *mystērion*. In fact, in a very important sense *mystērion* conveys the very opposite sense of "mystery," for while the English term means "something secret or unrevealed" or even "something intrinsically unknowable," the Greek expression refers to a truth that was previously undisclosed but has now been made known (see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Mystery of Christ and the Church: Head and Body, 'One Flesh,'" *TJ* 12n.s. [1991]: 80–83).

³⁵ See my "What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit? A Biblical Investigation," *JETS* 40 (1997): 229–40, for a detailed discussion of Eph 5:18 and related passages.

³⁶ Cf. Timothy G. Gombis, "Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18 in its Epistolary Setting," *TynBul* 53, no. 2 (2002): 262–64, citing Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 338; Köstenberger, "What Does It Mean?" p. 233; and Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 63–73.

believers' previous life-style, which was characterized by rebellion toward authority.

Several observations should be interjected at this point. First, the following instructions for wives and husbands (as well as those for parents and slaves/masters) are directed to Spirit-filled *believers*, that is, to committed Christians, rather than to those outside of Christ. It should therefore surprise no one that they are foolishness to those who do not follow the path of Christian discipleship. This does not mean that Ephesians 5:21–33 contains instructions on male-female relationships that are merely private in nature. Rather, these injunctions set forth the divine ideal for *all* (married) men and women, because they reflect the Creator's abiding will and are part of his general revelation, instituted for all of humanity rather than merely believers in Jesus Christ.

Second, what Paul has in mind here is not exactly "mutual submission" (in terms of identical roles), as may be supposed from reading Ephesians 5:21 in isolation from what follows.³⁷ Rather, "mutual submission coexists with a hierarchy of roles within the [Christian] household. . . . there is a general sense in which husbands are to have a submissive attitude to wives, putting their wives' interests before their own. But this does not eliminate the more specific [role] in which wives are to submit to husbands."³⁸ Specifically, in Ephesians 5:22 wives are enjoined to submit to their husbands who in Ephesians 5:23–24 are called the "head" of their wives as Christ is the head of the church. The balancing command to husbands is for them to love their wives with the sacrificial love of Christ (Eph 5:25–28). To this the observation may be added that in the abbreviated parallel in Colossians 3:18–19 the statement, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord," sums up the entirety of Paul's counsel to Christian wives with regard to their marital disposition (no word about "mutual submission" here). In that context, husbands' love is further defined as not being harsh with one's wife (cf. 1 Pet 3:7).

Third, as can be seen from comparing the present passage with Ephesians 1:22 and 4:15 (see discussion above), "headship" entails, not merely nurture (though it does that, see Eph 5:29), but also a position of authority. This position of the man is a function, not of intrinsic merit or worth on his part, but of God's sovereign creative will. Hence the husband's leadership, as well as the wife's submission, is to be exercised within the orbit of grace rather than legalism or coercion.

Fourth, the marriage relationship must be seen within the compass of God's larger salvation-historical, eschatological purposes, that is, the bringing of "all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph 1:10 NIV). This includes spiritual powers, such as demons as well as Satan, who will be fully submitted to Christ (Eph 1:21); this includes the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles in one salvation-historical, eschatological entity, the church (Eph 2:11–22; 3:6–13); and it includes also the restoration of the male-female marriage relationship as realized by Spirit-filled, committed Christian believers, who overcome the cursed

³⁷ See Wayne Grudem, "The myth of 'mutual submission,'" *CBMW News* 1.4 (October 1996): 1, 3–4, who suggests that the force of the Greek term *allēlois* is "some to others." Rather than speaking of "mutual submission," it may be more appropriate to speak of "mutual humility" (note the shift from submission to humility in 1 Pet 5:5–6).

³⁸ A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), p. 366, quoted in Gerald F. Hawthorne, "Marriage and Divorce," in *DPL*, p. 596. See also the discussion in Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender*, pp. 219–59.

struggle of manipulation and dominance (cf. Gen 3:16)³⁹ in the power of Christ and relate to each other in proper submission and Christlike love. God's purposes are greater than marriage or male-female roles, though they significantly include this relationship (see 1 Pet 3).

Fifth, it is thus manifestly not true (as is regularly alleged by egalitarian scholars) that female submission is merely a result of the Fall.⁴⁰ For in the present passage, it is Christian women—in whom Christ's redemptive purposes are to be realized—who are nonetheless enjoined to submit to their husbands. And elsewhere in Paul, the apostle, with reference to Genesis 2:18, stresses that it is not the man who was made for woman, but the woman was made for man (1 Cor 11:9), so that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man" (1 Cor 11:3 NIV).

Moreover, sixth, it is likewise not true that the restored pattern for marriage in Christ transcends that of submission and authority. This understanding is not borne out by the New Testament, be it here or elsewhere. To the contrary, Paul's argument in 1 Timothy 2:9–15 "turns to the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis for scriptural support of an understanding of the authority structure, the order of creation, which exists between men and women. . . . Adam and Eve are called into service as normative examples of how men and women should interrelate and what can happen if the proper authority structure is adhered to [or not adhered to] by subsequent peoples."⁴¹

Notably, Paul refutes as heretical the understanding (as advocated by some in his day) that "the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim 2:18 NIV), that is, that the future has so invaded the present that believers' present lives no longer need to heed principles built into the fabric of creation by the Creator. Contrary to the false teachers, God's created order continues to provide the framework for human relationships (cf. 1 Tim 4:3). While subverted by the Fall, this order is not to be set aside by Christians. Rather, it is God's redemptive purpose in Christ to counteract the effects of sin in human relationships (and other spheres) by believers' new life in the Spirit. Only in heaven will people no longer be given in marriage but be like angels (Mt 22:30 par.). Currently, they still marry, have children, and are to fulfill the cultural mandate in keeping with the male-female roles established at creation.

Seventh, wives are to recognize and respect proper authority over them. In principle, this is true also of men; they, too, must submit to Christ, local church leadership and discipline, the civil authorities, or their employers; but clearly there is a sense in which wives are called to submit to their husbands that is non-reciprocal (cf. 1 Pet 3:1–6 in the context of 1 Pet 2:13, 18). Husbands' exercise of authority, in turn, must not be arbitrary or abusive, but in love.⁴² Again, Petrine teaching is found to cohere with that of Paul: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you

³⁹ On Gen 3:16, see esp. Susan T. Foh, "What is the Woman's Desire (Gen 3:16, 4:7)," *WTJ* 37 (1975): 376–83, who rightly interprets 3:16 in light of 4:7 where "desire" conveys a sense of attempted mastery or control. See also the scenario at the fall (Gen 3), which is cited by Paul in 1 Tim 2:14–15 as one of two reasons for his prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over a man in the church (cf. 1 Tim 2:12).

⁴⁰ See, for example, Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: A Biblical Perspective* (Dallas: Word, 1990), p. 28.

⁴¹ Larry T. Kreitzer, "Adam and Christ," in *DPL*, p. 10.

live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life” (1 Pet 3:7 NIV).

After these larger observations, we may look at Ephesians 5:21–33 in some further detail. For both wives and husbands Paul, using the format of the ancient household code, cites models to emulate: for wives, the church in her submission to Christ; for husbands, Christ’s sacrificial love for the church, resulting in her cleansing, holiness, and purity. The apostle adds a second, common-sense analogy from the nature of things, appealing to self-interest: everyone loves one’s own body; in light of the one-flesh union between husbands and wives, if husbands love their wives, this is tantamount to husbands loving themselves.

Paul rounds out his discussion of marital roles with a quotation from Scripture: “. . . and the two will become one flesh” (5:31 NIV; cf. Gen 2:24: “they”). Some believe that this allusion to the creation narrative draws a connection between the marriage union and Christ’s relationship with the church by way of typology, that is, a “typical” correspondence along salvation-historical lines, with Adam prefiguring Christ, Eve foreshadowing the church, and Adam and Eve’s relationship typifying the union of Christ and the church.⁴³ This is possible, though it is important to note that the apostle’s focus here lies squarely on the union of Christ and the church (cf. Eph 5:30–32) and no longer on marriage (which dominated discussion in Eph 5:21–29).⁴⁴

In any case, Paul’s major point seems to be that marriage has the honor of embodying the “one-flesh” principle that later in salvation history became true spiritually also for the union of the exalted Christ with the church, which is described by Paul in terms of “head,” “members,” and “body.” This, too, like the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s salvific plan, is a *mystērion*: it was hidden in the divine wisdom in ages past but now has been given to Paul to reveal. Marriage is thus shown to be part and parcel of God’s overarching salvation-historical purposes of “bringing all things together under one head, even Christ” (Eph 1:10 NIV). The lesson to be drawn from this is that marriage in Christian teaching, rather than being an end in itself, is to be subsumed under Christ’s rule. Just as Christ must rule over all heavenly powers (Eph 1:21–22) and over the church (Eph 4:15), he must also rule over the marital relationship (Eph 5:21–33), the home (Eph 6:1–4) and the workplace (Eph 6:5–9). A married couple is part of the church (understood as family of families), and it, too, is part of that spiritual warfare that resolutely resists evil (Eph 6:10–14) and seeks to promote God’s purposes in this world (foremost the preaching of the gospel, Eph 6:15, 19–20).⁴⁵

Thus the marriage relationship should also be viewed in the context of Christian witness in an unbelieving environment, both directly by the husband’s and the wife’s living out God’s purposes for the Christian couple, as well as indirectly by being part of a biblical church that actively propagates the gospel message.

Peter. Peter’s comments on the marriage relationship are penned in the context of believers

⁴² Cf. Hawthorne, “Marriage and Divorce,” p. 596.

⁴³ Cf. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 429–35.

⁴⁴ See Köstenberger, “Mystery of Christ and the Church,” pp. 79–94.

⁴⁵ On spiritual warfare in relation to marriage and the family, see further the discussion below.

suffering at the hands of unbelievers, in the present instance believing wives called to live with unbelieving husbands. Peter’s general rule of conduct is submission “for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men” (1 Pet 2:13), including government and authorities at work and at home (1 Pet 2:13–3:1). In the case of work relationships, submission is urged not only to superiors “who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh” (1 Pet 2:18 NIV). Wives are to be submissive to unbelieving husbands “in the same way” (1 Pet 3:1 NIV).⁴⁶

In all of this Christ has set the example (1 Pet 2:21), all the way to the cross (1 Pet 2:24; *epi* plus the accusative). Marriage, as well as other human relationships, is thus set in the larger framework of a believer’s Christian testimony in the surrounding unbelieving world. While there is no guarantee (cf. 1 Cor 7:16), believing wives are to work and pray that their husbands “may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence” of their lives (1 Pet 3:1–2 NIV; cf. 1 Cor 7:12–14). Such wives are to cultivate inner, spiritual beauty and not “give way to fear,” being submissive to their husbands as Sarah was to Abraham, even when his directives are unreasonable or even unspiritual (1 Pet 3:3–6 NIV; cf., e.g., Gen 20).

The general principle issuing from Peter’s counsel is that leading unbelievers to Christ is a greater cause than insisting on justice in human relationships. Believers are to defer their craving for justice until the eschaton, trusting God as Jesus did (1 Pet 2:23). While Paul enjoins believing wives in his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians to submit to their believing husbands, here Peter raises the bar further still. Wifely submission to an unbelieving husband—and any resulting suffering—is beautiful in the sight of God if borne reverently and with hope in God.

In the context of the third chapter of Peter’s first epistle, there seems to be an almost imperceptible shift of focus from mixed marriages to those among believers. While 1 Peter 3:1–4 appears to apply primarily to the former, 1 Peter 3:5–6 evokes “the holy women of the past,” including Sarah, whose husband Abraham, while occasionally sinning against Sarah, is hardly the prototype of the unbelieving husband. Thus Peter, like Paul, envisions marital relationships between believers that are characterized by wifely submission and husbands’ considerate treatment of their wives.

In the sole verse addressed to husbands, Peter admirably balances the recognition of distinctions between the marital partners and the notion of their equality in Christ. On the one hand, wives are called “the weaker partner” (whether the phrase is to be understood in physical or generic terms, this is hardly a banner verse of egalitarianism). Yet on the other hand, wives are called “fellow heirs” together with their husbands of the gracious gift of life (1 Pet 3:7). The reference to removing any obstacles for joint marital prayer likewise presupposes that the initial focus on mixed marriages has now given way to those among believers.

Concluding thoughts. While marriage is, biblically speaking, not a “sacrament” in the Roman Catholic sense,⁴⁷ it—as well as parenting—is nonetheless a vehicle used by God to train the man

⁴⁶ This in no way amounts to a license for husbands to abuse their wives physically or in any other way, nor does it preclude the necessity for wives to separate from their abusive husbands in order to avoid serious harm. The delicate pastoral implications of such situations call for considerable wisdom in each individual case.

and the woman (and their children) in the life of faith. For both the husband and the wife, living out their proper, God-willed roles becomes an important part of their discipleship. Moreover, it is an important part of their one-flesh union that they produce not merely physical offspring, but that they pursue the nurture and facilitate the growth of spiritual offspring, that is, aid the Spirit's work in the lives of their children in conviction of sin, conversion, regeneration, and sanctification. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

Through marriage men are brought into being for the glorification and service of Jesus Christ and for the increase of his kingdom. This means that marriage is not only a matter of producing children, but also of educating them to be obedient to Jesus Christ. . . . [I]n marriage it is for the service of Jesus Christ that new men are created.⁴⁸

This is why a Christian marriage and family must be committed and subjected to Jesus Christ. And this is also why marriage and the family must not be viewed as an obstacle to true personal holiness, purity and sanctification, but as an important key to the development of these and other virtues. In godly homes husband and wife sharpen one another “as iron sharpens iron” (cf. Prov 27:17), and their children are drawn into the communal life of the family and into the path of discipleship pursued and modeled by their parents.

This, too, is part of obeying the risen Christ's commission for his followers to “go and make disciples” (Mt 28:18–20). What is more, in the case of one's own children, too, discipleship entails baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and being taught to obey everything Jesus commanded his followers. Baptism and committed instruction, formal (such as by way of catechism) as well as informal (as opportunities arise) are not optional, but an essential part of the life of the Christian family.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE, SINGLENESS

Before moving on to a more extensive discussion of children and parenting, two important issues related to marriage must first be treated: (1) divorce and remarriage⁴⁹ and (2) singleness. In the

⁴⁷ Contra Germain Grisez, “The Christian Family as Fulfilment of Sacramental Marriage,” *SCE* 9, no. 1 (1996): 23–33.

⁴⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. N. H. Smith (London: SCM, 1955), p. 183, quoted in Banner, “Who are my Mother and my Brothers?” *SCE* 9, no. 1 (1996): 8.

⁴⁹ For a range of evangelical views, see H. Wayne House, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views* (Leicester/Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990). See also the excellent treatment of divorce and remarriage in David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), pp. 177–204; and the surveys by Raymond F. Collins, *Divorce in the New Testament* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992) and P. E. Harrell, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Early Church: A History of Divorce and Remarriage in the Ante-Nicene Church* (Austin, Tex.: Sweet, 1967). Roman Catholic theology views marriage as a sacrament and hence indissoluble, although canon law makes provision for the annulment of marriages on certain grounds. Divorcees are barred from receiving communion elements. However, while Scripture views marriage as permanent, it does not view it therefore as a sacrament (see Köstenberger, “The Mystery of Christ and the Church,” pp. 86–87). Moreover, as will be seen below, exceptions are made in New Testament teaching in the case of adultery and desertion by an unbelieving spouse, so that a distinction ought to be made between legitimate and illegitimate divorces rather than discriminating against all divorcees, even those whose divorce is biblically legitimate. On the Roman Catholic debate about divorce, see also the works referred to in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Matthean

case of the former, the marital union is ruptured, and the question arises whether or not remarriage is permissible. In the case of singleness, the unmarried person, whether not yet married, widowed, divorced or permanently single, faces a set of unique challenges and opportunities that likewise must be viewed in a scriptural framework.

Divorce and remarriage. *Jesus: The exception clause.* God hates divorce (Mal 2:16), and Jesus, reminding his listeners that God in the beginning had made man male and female (cf. Gen 1:27) and that the man, upon marriage, was to leave his father and mother and to be united to his wife (cf. Gen 2:24), taught that this one-flesh union was inseparable: “So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mt 19:4–6 [NIV] par.). Why, then, is divorce legislated in the Mosaic regulations (Deut 24:1, 3)? According to Jesus, this was done by concession to human hardness of heart rather than constituting the ideal. It was not the original vision and creative will of the founding Father (Mt 19:7–8 par.; cf. Mt 5:31–32). Marriage was intended as a life-long, faithful union of a man and a woman. Recognizing the high standard set by Jesus, his original followers responded dejectedly, “If this is the situation . . . , it is better not to marry” (Mt 19:10).⁵⁰ To which Jesus replied, in essence, that to some it is given to remain celibate for the sake of the kingdom; otherwise people must subject themselves to God’s original expectation for marriage.

There is one exception, however, mentioned in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9: “except for marital unfaithfulness” [*porneia*].⁵¹ This was infinitely stricter than the scenario mentioned in the opening statement of Jesus’ interrogators, “for any and every reason” (Mt 19:3 NIV; cf. 5:31). While the challenge was aimed at eliciting from Jesus a response that would enable his questioners to assign him to one of the leading rabbinic schools of the day, be it the stricter Shammai or the more liberal Hillel, Jesus’ answer confounded such hopes by refusing to endorse either position.⁵²

Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence,” *TS* 37 (1976): 225. A recent treatment is by David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), who contends that (1) both Jesus and Paul condemned illegitimate divorce and discouraged divorce even on valid grounds; (2) both Jesus and Paul affirmed the Old Testament grounds for divorce, which were adultery and neglect or abuse; and (3) both Jesus and Paul condemned remarriage after an invalid, but not a valid, divorce (p. ix; see esp. pp. 133–212).

⁵⁰ Some, such as Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993 [1950]), p. 71, argue that the disciples’ response proves that Jesus’ standard must have been extremely high—that is, no divorce or remarriage under any circumstances. If Jesus had merely aligned himself with the more conservative branch of Judaism of his day (the school of Shammai), why would Jesus’ followers have been surprised? However, this assumes that the disciples’ reaction was legitimate, which almost certainly it was not. More likely, they, like many of their Jewish contemporaries, assumed a somewhat more lenient standard and consequently were reacting against Jesus’ pronouncement including the exception for adultery. See esp. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage*, p. 168, who argues that the disciples’ answer most likely indicates that they held a Hillelite-type “any matter” view.

⁵¹ The Synoptic parallels Mk 10:11–12 and Lk 16:18 mention no exception, though such a radical breach as adultery—a capital offense, albeit not enforced—was not in question as grounds for divorce (e.g. *m. Soṭa* 1:1, 5). See Stott, “Marriage and Divorce,” pp. 169–70, who defends the authenticity of the exception clause, points out that adultery as grounds for divorce was not in dispute, and suggests that Matthew may have included this for his Jewish audience while Mark and Luke, both writing primarily to Gentile readers, did not have the same concern. Contra R. H. Stein, “Divorce,” *DJG*, p. 197, who claims that “its authenticity [i.e. the exception clause in Matthew] is doubtful” and suggests that “Matthew has added an exception clause to Jesus’ teaching.” On adultery, see esp. Keener, “Adultery, Divorce,” *DNTB*, pp. 7–10.

According to the Mishnah,

The School of Shammai say: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, “Because he has found in her indecency in anything” (Dt 24:1). And the School of Hillel say: [He may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, “Because he has found in her indecency in anything.”⁵³

In the present instance, then, Jesus aligned himself more closely with the more conservative branch of Judaism in his day. Yet he refused to get involved in legalistic squabbles, focusing instead on the original design of marriage in God’s plan.⁵⁴ Not only must divorce be prevented by fostering commitment to marriage, divorce is shown to be fundamentally at odds with God’s creative purposes. Nevertheless, adultery is acknowledged as legitimate grounds for divorce, presumably since it violates the “one flesh” principle underlying marriage⁵⁵ and was at least in Old Testament times punishable by death.⁵⁶ After all, it would be difficult to continue a marriage if the partner guilty of adultery had been put to death by stoning!

Nevertheless, some would seek to delimit even further the exception stipulated by Jesus by taking him to refer here, not to sexual infidelity in marriage, that is, adultery, but to some more narrow offense, be it incest (Lev 18:6–18; 20:17; Deut 27:22), the breaking of an engagement (Dt 22:20–21), or the like.⁵⁷ John Piper, for example, in two papers posted at his website,⁵⁸ doubts that adultery was assumed by Mark and Luke as a legitimate ground for divorce (and thus omitted in their parallel accounts) and so is led to explore the possibility that Matthew’s exception clause conforms to the absolute statements in Mark 10:11–12 and Luke 16:18. He notes that *porneia* is used alongside *moicheia*—and thus distinguished from it—in Matthew 15:19. Does that not

⁵² See Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage*, p. 173, who contends that “Matthew’s version reflects a real rabbinic debate.” For a similar dynamic, see Mark 12:13–17 par.

⁵³ From *m. Git.* 9:10. The passage continues, “R. Akiba [ca. AD 135] says: Even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written, ‘And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes . . .’” See also Sir 25:26: “If she does not go as you direct, separate her from yourself” (lit., “cut her off from your flesh,” that is, divorce her: Deut 24:1; up to this point they had been “one flesh”: Gen 2:24).

⁵⁴ Cf. Keener, “Adultery, Divorce,” *DNTB*, p. 6, who notes that Jesus “probably accepts but radicalizes the Shammaite position.”

⁵⁵ So Stott, “Marriage and Divorce,” p. 170, quoted in Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, p. 202.

⁵⁶ Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22. Note that Jesus extends the scope of adultery even to a man’s heart attitude (Mt 5:27–28). At the same time, if the tradition underlying Jn 7:53–8:11 is authentic, Jesus also recasts the issue of proper punishment for adultery: “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7 NIV). See also Joseph considering divorce when suspecting his fiancé Mary of sexual infidelity (Mt 1:19).

⁵⁷ See esp. Gordon J. Wenham and William E. Heth, *Jesus and Divorce* (updated ed.; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997 [1984]); cf. Fitzmyer, “Matthean Divorce Texts,” pp. 197–226, esp. 208–11, who thinks incest is in view. But note that Heth has changed his mind and now concurs with my position; see William A. Heth, “Jesus on Divorce: How My Mind Has Changed,” *SBJT* 6, no. 1 (2002: 429). See also Mark Geldard, “Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce,” *Chm* 92 (1978): 134–43; and Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple: A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19.13 [sic]–12 and 1. Cor. 11.3–16*, trans. N. Tomkinson and J. Gray; ASNU 24 (Lund: Gleerup, 1965).

⁵⁸ John Piper, “Divorce and Remarriage: A Position Paper” and “On Divorce and Remarriage in the Event of Adultery” (July 21, 1986) posted on Desiring God Ministries <www.desiringgod.org/library/topics/divorce_remarriage/div_rem_paper.html> and <www.desiringgod.org/library/topics/divorce_remarriage/dr_adultery.html>.

prove that it should also be distinguished in Matthew 19:9? Moreover, *porneia* in John 8:41 refers to (alleged) sex during the betrothal period. Is this the term's meaning also in Matthew? Piper thinks the answer is yes, and he construes the Matthean exception clause as written to show that Joseph's decision to divorce Mary (on account of her supposed premarital sexual infidelity) was just.⁵⁹

Piper's view, however, though possible, is weakened by the following considerations. First, Piper inadequately recognizes the common rabbinic practice of abbreviating an account for the sake of making it more memorable.⁶⁰ Hence it is illegitimate to conform the longer Matthean version to the shorter Markan and Lukan accounts. Second, it is fallacious to argue from Jesus' "silence" in Mark and Luke regarding exceptions for divorce. Rather than indicating that Jesus did not teach any such exceptions, it is much more likely that he did not elaborate on points at which he agreed with the commonly held view in his day. As Instone-Brewer notes,

If Jesus said nothing about a universally accepted belief, then it is assumed by most scholars that this indicated his agreement with it. He is never recorded as saying anything about the immorality of sexual acts before marriage (to the dismay of many youth leaders), but no one assumes that he approved of them. Similarly, everyone assumes that he believed in monotheism, but it would be difficult to demonstrate this from the Gospel accounts. Also, Jesus nowhere explicitly allowed or forbade remarriage after the death of a spouse, but we assume that he did allow this because all Jews, including Paul, clearly allowed it.⁶¹

Instone-Brewer proceeds to point out that on all these matters we find it easy to assume that Jesus agreed with these commonly held positions because we, too, agree with them. In the present case, however, some (inconsistently) construe Jesus' (alleged) silence on a subject as disagreement with the prevailing practice in Jesus' day. This is illegitimate.

Third, while it is true that *porneia* may convey the notion of premarital sex in John 8:41, by Piper's own admission there are instances where the term, in context, refers to adultery (or a variety of other forms of sexual immorality). In the end, we are therefore thrown back to the context at hand. Yet in Matthew 19:9, unlike in Matthew 15:19, *moicheia* is not used, so that it is not necessarily legitimate to import the distinction made there into the present context. Unless it can be shown therefore (which is exceedingly unlikely) that *porneia* functioned as a technical term

⁵⁹ Piper also believes that in Lk 16:18 Jesus excludes remarriage in the case of divorce and so interprets Mt 5:32 accordingly. Regarding Joseph's decision to divorce Mary, it should be acknowledged that the first-century Jewish understanding of an engagement was akin to marriage in the sense that breaking the engagement necessitated a formal divorce (be it private or public; see Carson, *Matthew*, EBC 8 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984), p. 75, citing Num 5:11–31; *m. Sof.* 1:1–5; David Hill, "A Note on Matthew i.19," *ExpTim* 76 [1964–65]: 133–34; A. Tosato, "Joseph, Being a Just Man [Matt 1:19]," *CBQ* 41 [1979]: 547–51; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 91, whose entire treatment of Mt 1:19 on pp. 87–95 repays careful study, cites *m. Git.* 6:2; *m. Ketub.* 1:2; 4:2; *m. Yebam.* 2:6; *b. Git.* 26b.

⁶⁰ Cf. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage*, pp. 161–67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

for fornication apart from further contextual qualifiers, it is hard to see how the present reference can be limited to sex during the betrothal period.

In fact, the remaining New Testament instances of *porneia* are hardly limited to premarital sex during the betrothal period but extend to various forms of sexual immorality other than adultery.⁶² While *porneia* and its cognates by themselves are very broad and non-specific, the expression is regularly clarified by its context: if payment for sex is involved, the reference is to prostitution;⁶³ if close relatives are in view, the issue is incest;⁶⁴ in the case of same-sex relationships, it is homosexuality;⁶⁵ in the case of an unmarried couple, fornication; and if the context is marriage, sex outside its boundaries constitutes adultery.⁶⁶

Since in the present case the subject is clearly marriage and its violation by one partner, *and the expression is otherwise not qualified*,⁶⁷ the sexual immorality referred to here is the breaking of the marriage vow by way of sexual relations with another woman (hence the NIV's "marital unfaithfulness") or perhaps by some other form of sexual immorality (hence the TNIV's "sexual immorality").⁶⁸ Not that this betrayal of trust constitutes a *mandate* for divorce—God's desire always remains that forgiveness be granted and that the marriage be preserved (cf. 1 Cor 7:11). But while not required in such circumstances, divorce is nonetheless permissible.⁶⁹ Stott sums up Jesus' teaching well: "It seems, then, that he abrogated the death penalty for sexual infidelity, and made this the only legitimate ground for dissolving the marriage bond, by divorce not death, and then only as a permission."⁷⁰

⁶² See now esp. the thorough discussion of the philological evidence for the meaning of *porneia* in Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage*, pp. 156–59, who contends that the phrase is here used because it was judged to be the best translation of the phrase זרות לבר in Deut 24:1 and who sums up Jesus' teaching on divorce as follows: marriage should be monogamous and lifelong; divorce is never compulsory and should be avoided unless the erring partner stubbornly refuses to repent; marriage is optional; and Hillelite "any matter" divorces are invalid (p. 187).

⁶³ Mt 21:31–32; Lk 15:30; 1 Cor 6:13–18.

⁶⁴ 1 Cor 5:1; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.

⁶⁵ Cf. Lev 18:22: *arsenos . . . koitēn*.

⁶⁶ Jer 3:9 LXX. Cf. *TDNT*, 6:579–95; BDAG, p. 854: "Of the sexual unfaithfulness of a married woman"; Joseph Jensen, "Does *porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina," *NovT* 20 (1978): 161–84. As to Piper's argument from Lk 16:18, he fails to recognize that the second part of the phrase speaks of marrying an *illegitimately divorced* woman, not of marrying a woman whose divorce was legitimate (such as covered by the "exception clause," etc.). His argument is circular, and he assumes what he sets out to prove at the outset.

⁶⁷ Cf. Stott, "Marriage and Divorce," p. 171, who notes the lack of further qualification.

⁶⁸ Cf. Stein, "Divorce," *DJG*, p. 194, who contends that "unchastity (i.e., *porneia*) has too broad a range of meaning to be interpreted so narrowly. It may indeed include these narrow meanings, but it cannot be restricted to them." Stein also points out that while Matthew elsewhere uses a more narrow term, *moicheia* (or the verb *moicheuō*), for adultery (Mt 5:27, 28, 32; 15:19; 19:18), and while elsewhere *moicheia* and *porneia* are distinguished (Mk 7:21–22 par. Mt 15:19; 1 Cor 6:9; Heb 13:4), *porneia* is a broader term that nonetheless includes *moicheia* (p. 195). See also the very thorough discussion in Carson, *Matthew*, pp. 412–19, who, before deciding in favor of the conclusion adopted in the present essay, discusses seven major interpretations of the Matthean "exception clause."

⁶⁹ Cf. Stott, "Marriage and Divorce," pp. 170–72.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Paul: The “Pauline privilege.” Paul addresses the same issue in a somewhat different context, that of a believer’s desertion by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:12–16).⁷¹ Since Jesus had not addressed the question, the apostle must adjudicate the situation himself (“I, not the Lord,” 1 Cor 7:12), which in no way diminishes the authoritative nature of Paul’s apostolic pronouncement. A mixed marriage in such circumstances is preferable (cf. 1 Pet 3:1–2), because it provides a Christian environment for the children of this marital union (1 Cor 7:14). Yet if the unbelieving spouse insists on leaving, the believer is not to hold him or her back, because God’s desire is for peace, and there is no guarantee that the unbeliever will eventually be saved (1 Cor 7:15–16).⁷²

Note the Corinthian context: apparently some were teaching the superiority of singleness over marriage on the basis of a Greek dualism that disparaged sexual relations as inferior to true spirituality expressed through an ascetic lifestyle.⁷³ To counter this entirely non-Christian notion, Paul wrote that a wife must not divorce (*chōrizō*) her husband; but if she does (disobeying the apostle’s ruling), she must remain unmarried or be reconciled. The same applies if circumstances are reversed (*aphiēmi*; 1 Cor 7:10–11). In the case of the conversion of one spouse, the believer must not initiate divorce, but if the unbelieving spouse leaves, the remaining spouse is “not bound” (*dedoulōtai*; v. 15): divorce is legitimate, and (it may reasonably be inferred) the believer is free to remarry.⁷⁴

In the Corinthian context, then, a married person must not divorce his or her spouse out of a desire to be more “spiritual.” Neither is it legitimate for a married person to observe continence, that is, to refrain permanently from sexual intercourse with his or her partner in marriage (1 Cor 7:3–5). The only (minor) concession made by Paul is that believers who are deserted by their unbelieving spouse may divorce and remarry. It would appear that the same principle obtains today. The divorce of those deserted by their unbelieving spouses ought to be considered legitimate, with the implication that remarriage would also be legitimate in those circumstances.

Summary of New Testament teaching on divorce and pastoral implications. There are thus two legitimate reasons for divorce stipulated in New Testament teaching: sexual immorality or

⁷¹ See the thorough treatment by Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage*, pp. 189–212.

⁷² On the entire pericope, see esp. the excellent treatment by Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 290–306. On the phrase “God has called us to peace,” see Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage*, p. 203, with reference to his earlier work, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (TSAJ 30; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992), 21, 37, 82, 144–45, in which the author shows that “for the sake of peace” constitutes rabbinic legal terminology for what might be called “pragmatism” as opposed to a strict application of the law.

⁷³ Cf. 1 Cor 7:1, 5; cf. 1 Tim 4:3.

⁷⁴ So rightly Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage*, pp. 201–3. Needless to say, the dissimilarity between the Corinthian situation and the contemporary setting could not be greater, since few today want to divorce their spouse in order to pursue a more perfect, sexless spirituality. In most cases, people have “fallen out of love” and simply want to get out of a present—now inconvenient—marriage to marry another, more desirable partner (cf. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 296). The injunction in 1 Cor 7:11, “but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband,” is at times taken as an absolute prohibition of remarriage under any circumstances. However, what is prohibited here is only remarriage after *illegitimate*, not legitimate, divorce (cf. 1 Cor 7:10: “the wife should not separate from her husband” with 1 Cor 7:11: “but if she does

adultery (Mt 5:32; 19:9) and desertion by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:11–15).⁷⁵ Now it stands to reason that *if the divorce is legitimate, the person who has been legitimately divorced is free to remarry*.⁷⁶ This is borne out by the standard Jewish formula in the bill of divorce cited in the Mishnah, “See, you are free to marry any man” (*m. Git.* 9:3).⁷⁷ It also seems to be the assumption underlying Jesus’ statement that “anyone who divorces his wife . . . causes her to become an adulteress [assuming remarriage as a matter of course], and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery” (Mt 5:32 NIV).⁷⁸

The same would be true for those left widowed by the death of their spouse. Thus Paul encourages young widows to remarry (1 Tim 5:14) and elsewhere rules more globally that a widow “is *free* . . . [to be] joined to another man” (Rom 7:3 NASB, emphasis added).⁷⁹ Still at another place, the apostle writes that “a wife is *bound* to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is *free to marry* anyone she wishes, *but he must belong to the Lord*” (1 Cor 7:39). Whether widowed or legitimately divorced, then, a person bereft of his or her spouse without fault of their own is free, and frequently even encouraged to, remarry. The implications of these various exigencies on qualifications for church leadership will be discussed further below. At this point it will suffice to suggest three general pastoral implications for dealing with this issue.

First, everything should be done to preserve marriages (except in extreme cases, such as persistent spousal abuse). Second, one must determine if a given divorce is or has been legitimate.

separate”).

⁷⁵ Death of a spouse also allows the remaining spouse to remarry, “only in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39; cf. Rom 7:3). To this may be added other extreme circumstances (such as persistent spousal abuse) when confronted through the process laid out in Mt 18:15–17. Cf. Hawthorne, “Marriage and Divorce, Adultery and Incest,” p. 599, who asks, “Is it possible to extrapolate from this that other such marital travesties, although not identical to these (e.g., cruelty, desertion, physical abuse, the systematic psychological destruction of one’s marriage partner, and the like), might also have been included as exceptions to the ideal . . .?” and urges that “any plan to divorce must not be made independently of the community of faith or apart from the advice and support of the authorized leaders of the church.”

⁷⁶ Cf. Craig S. Keener, . . . *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 61–66; Stein, “Divorce,” *DJG*, pp. 192–93: “‘Divorce’ therefore in our texts should be understood as assuming the right to remarry”; Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, p. 199: “Where divorce is justified there is freedom to remarry”; Craig L. Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” *TJ* 11 (1990): 196: “Divorce in biblical times virtually always carried with it the right to remarry; no NT text rescinds this permission.” Contra Wenham and Heth, *Jesus and Divorce*; William E. Heth, “Divorce and Remarriage: The Search for an Evangelical Hermeneutic,” *TJ* 16 (1995): 63–100: see the critique by Stott, “Marriage and Divorce,” p. 171, who calls Wenham and Heth’s view “extreme” and “not conclusive” (though “plausibly argued”; the reference is to a series of three articles by Wenham on “The Biblical View of Marriage and Divorce” published in *Third Way*, 1.20–22 [October and November 1977]). See also House, *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*.

⁷⁷ Cf. Keener, “Adultery, Divorce,” *DNTB*, p. 6: “the very term for legal divorce meant freedom to remarry.”

⁷⁸ Cf. Stein, “Divorce,” *DJG*, p. 195, who also notes that “divorce and remarry” are paired in Mk 10:11–12 (cf. v. 9) and the link is also assumed in Deut 24:1–4.

⁷⁹ Cf. *m. Qid.* 1:1. Originally part of an illustration in a different context, the verse states that a woman may remarry if her husband has died. As Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 413 n. 24, rightly notes, “These verses are sometimes cited to prove that remarriage on any basis other than the death of one’s spouse is adulterous. Whether this is the biblical teaching or not, these verses at any rate are probably not relevant to the issue. Paul is not teaching about remarriage but citing a simple example to prove a point.”

If so, a person may remarry, and a minister may perform the wedding ceremony. If not, the person may not remarry, and the minister should not officiate. Third, a clear distinction should be drawn between the guilty and the innocent party (rather than a “no-fault” approach to divorce): the innocent party should be treated as if single or unmarried, the guilty party as divorced.⁸⁰

Singleness. Singleness, similar to adolescence, was probably not as clearly defined a concept in New Testament times as it is in the Western world today. If a person was “single,” he or she more likely than not was in transition, whether that person was too young to be married, the death of a spouse had left the person widowed, or the like. Singleness as a settled state and a conscious life-style choice was comparatively uncommon, and marriage was the norm.⁸¹ Having said this, however, both Jesus and Paul teach that there is such a thing as the “gift of celibacy” (1 Cor 7:7), or, as Jesus calls it, eunuchs “for the sake of the kingdom” (Mt 19:12 [RSV] par.), that allows unmarried persons to devote greater and more undistracted attention to religious service. As Paul comments in his major treatment on the subject,

An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. . . . I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in *undivided devotion to the Lord*.⁸²

It is a remarkable fact that both Jesus and Paul, our Savior as well as the most significant proponent of early Christianity (Peter alone excepted), were single. Clearly, the reasons differed. It would have been unthinkable for the Christ and the Son of God to enter into marriage with a human female during his brief earthly sojourn. In Paul’s case, the divine gift of celibacy enabled this strategically called man to spearhead the Gentile mission in a way that a married man probably never could have. Paul’s frequent travels and imprisonments also would have put great strains on a marriage. By contrast, the other apostles all had wives, as Paul himself makes clear: “Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?” (1 Cor 9:5 NIV).

In keeping with contemporary Jewish custom, married men, with their wives’ permission, could leave home to study with a rabbi, as Jesus’ disciples did (Mk 1:18–20; 10:28–29 par.). Paul also recognizes that spouses may temporarily refrain from sexual relations “by mutual consent and for a time” for the purpose of prayer (1 Cor 7:5 NIV). However, he urges marriage partners to resume such relations after this brief period of sexual abstinence so that Satan would not tempt them owing to their lack of self-control. Demonstrably, however, celibacy was not the norm for the apostles (1 Cor 9:5) or for those in charge of the first-century church (1 Tim 3:2, 12).⁸³

⁸⁰ So rightly Keener, . . . *And Marries Another*, p. 109.

⁸¹ Thus Paul can stipulate that church leaders are to be “faithful husbands” (1 Tim 3:2, 12, my translation; cf. TNIV).

⁸² 1 Cor 7:32–35 NIV, emphasis added.

For this reason evangelicals do not see celibacy as a ministerial requirement, contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, which requires celibacy of all priests, primarily because Jesus himself was unmarried. Since according to the evangelical understanding church leaders are not to embody or represent Christ himself, especially not in the sacramental sense of administering mass following the pattern of Old Testament priestly service, there is correspondingly no need for them to refrain from sexual relations in order to remain ritually pure. Thus singleness is considered to be a gift given by God to the select few rather than as a requirement for all ministers. Despite efforts to demonstrate the contrary, the Roman Catholic understanding owes significantly more to later ecclesiastical tradition than it does to New Testament teaching.⁸⁴

Applied to the contemporary context, singleness should be recognized as a gift for the select few that holds significant advantages for ministry but is neither intrinsically superior nor inferior to marriage. In fact, Paul assumes that church officers be married (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Tit 1:6)—though this should not be construed as a requirement—and considers marriage and the family to be a training and proving ground for prospective church leaders.⁸⁵ In most churches married couples with children make up the fabric of the congregation, and they should be sensitive to include single people socially in order for them not to feel left out. Single individuals, for their part, ought to find their sufficiency in Christ and in serving him. Nevertheless, unless a single person feels satisfied in this state, it is likely that God will eventually lead that person to get married, which is the primary divinely instituted pattern of human relationships in the Old Testament and reaffirmed in the New.

Finally, the last several decades have seen a marked rise in cohabitation without marriage as well as in the practice of premarital sex. It clearly follows from biblical teaching, however, that both are violations of God's design for male-female relationships. In biblical times, the Jews regarded (a woman's) premarital sexual activity as tantamount to prostitution, with the penalty for sex with a person to whom one was not married frequently being death.⁸⁶ In Scripture, marriage is presented as a sacred, inviolable, and exclusive relationship between one man and one woman, properly entered into by the mutual pledge of lifelong marital faithfulness and consummated by sexual relations, which constitutes the marriage as a "one-flesh" union (Gen 2:23–24). As Jesus says, the marriage event issues in the man and the woman being no longer two, but one, having been joined together by none other than God (Mt 19:6 = Mk 10:8–9). Paul maintains that even sexual intercourse with a prostitute results in a one-flesh union, albeit an illegitimate one (1 Cor 6:16, referring to Gen 2:24); the same would be true for any form of sexual intercourse outside of a monogamous marriage relationship. For "[t]he essential moral problem with nonmarital sexual intercourse is that it performs a life-uniting act without a life-uniting intent, thus violating its

⁸³ On celibacy on ancient Judaism, including the Qumran community, see Keener, "Marriage," *DNTB*, pp. 682–83.

⁸⁴ See Köstenberger, "Review Article: The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy," *EuroJTh* 1 (1992): 173–79.

⁸⁵ 1 Tim 3:4–5; cf. v. 15. See George W. Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 173: "the home is the proving ground of fidelity for all officers."

⁸⁶ Cf. Deut 22:20–24; *Jub.* 20:4; 33:20; and others. See Keener, "Adultery, Divorce," *DNTB*, p. 10, who notes that this penalty was not enforced in New Testament times.

intrinsic meaning.”⁸⁷

Again, “Extramarital acts of sexual love are, no less than unloving begetting, attempts to put asunder what God joined together in ordaining that the one and selfsame act of human beings should have both a unitive and a procreative end or good.”⁸⁸ But what about engaged couples? In short, one may answer as follows: if the couple is ready to assume the full entailments of marriage in the here and now, why not get married immediately? “On the other hand, if an engaged couple is really contemplating *pre*-marital sexual relations in the authentic moral meaning of this phrase, then they *know* that they are seeking to justify something that is *not* fully responsible.”⁸⁹ Premarital sex amounts to a futile attempt to act as if married while taking more and offering less than married love requires in terms of “the degree of responsibility and the kind of love and trust and fidelity” husband and wife are called to have for one another.⁹⁰

While it is inevitable that those in the larger culture who are not committed to observing biblical teaching in this area persist in cohabitation or engage in premarital sex, there can be no doubt that this is not a legitimate option for believers. Sexual abstinence prior to marriage and sexual faithfulness in marriage are the biblical expectations, and it is evident that the practice of the former constitutes the best preparation for the observance of the latter.

CHILDREN, PARENTING, AND THE HOME

Procreation and the metaphor of adoption. Procreation is an integral part of God’s plan for marriage.⁹¹ The Creator told the first human couple in the beginning, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth” (Gen 1:28 NIV; cf. Gen 9:1, 7; 35:11). Though originally two individual

⁸⁷ Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, p. 158; cf. Richard J. Foster, “Sexuality and Singleness,” in *Readings in Christian Ethics*, Vol. 2: *Issues and Applications*, ed. David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), p. 157. Contra the unconvincing attempt by John F. Dedek, “Premarital Petting and Coitus,” *Chicago Studies* 9 (1970): 227–42, to argue that there is no biblical condemnation of premarital sex. According to Dedek, *porneia* in Mt 5:32 and 19:9 means adultery; in 1 Cor 5:1 it means incest; in 1 Cor 6:12–20 (cf. 1 Thess 4:3–4) it means union with a prostitute; in Gal 5:19–20 and Eph 5:5 it might mean adultery; in 1 Cor 6:9 it probably means prostitution and promiscuous sexual relations; and in Acts 15:20, 29 it refers to irregular marriages listed in Lev 18 such as incestuous unions. Deut 22:1–29 condemns a woman’s deceiving her husband prior to marriage into thinking she is a virgin when she is not; rape; and sleeping with a woman already engaged to be married to another man. However, Dedek’s attempt to determine Scripture’s stance toward premarital sex exclusively by a study of *porneia* is misguided, first and foremost because he unduly ignores the foundational OT passage on marriage, Gen 2:23–24, and its covenant character. Moreover, even on Dedek’s own terms, it clearly follows that if *porneia* means sexual immorality—which is everywhere forbidden in Scripture—and the only venue in which sexual relations are considered moral in Scripture is within the marriage covenant, sex without, outside, and before marriage are equally beyond the pale of biblical morality.

⁸⁸ Paul Ramsey, *One Flesh: A Christian View of Sex Within, Outside and Before Marriage* (Grove Booklets on Ethics 8; Bramcote, Notts.: Grove Books, 1975), p. 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ For a discussion of rabbinic attitudes toward procreation including references, see Keener, “Marriage,” *DNTB*, 681, who notes that rabbis required husbands to divorce their wives who after a trial period proved unable to bear children (*m. Yebam.* 6:6). On the home, see the excursus on the ancient household below. On hospitality, see S. C. Barton, “Hospitality,” in *DLNTD*, pp. 501–7.

persons, husband and wife become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24) in their marital union, which is given visible expression by the children resulting from that union. Consequently, barrenness is regularly seen in the Old Testament as the result of divine disfavor (e.g., Gen 29:31), while children are regarded as a gift and blessing from God (Ps 127:4–5a).⁹² Rachel’s outcry to Jacob is symptomatic, “Give me children, or I’ll die!” (Gen 30:1 NIV). The removal of barrenness amounts to the lifting of divine reproach and is tantamount to being “remembered by the Lord” (Gen 30:23; 1 Sam 1:19–20). Without discriminating against childless couples, the general expectation for man and woman created by God is to be married and to have children.⁹³

However, while in the Old Testament childbearing has not only an important biological function but also forms an integral part of God’s covenant promise, leading to the birth of the messianic “seed” of the woman,⁹⁴ the New Testament significantly speaks of believers’ “adoption” into God’s family through Christ.⁹⁵ While in Old Testament times certain ethnic constraints applied, now we are “all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26 NIV). If anyone belongs to Christ, he is Abraham’s descendant, and included in the promise (Gal 3:28).

This is an eschatological, salvation-historical event of first-rate import: through adoption, believers are introduced into the filial relationship between Jesus the Son and God his Father, sharing together in the new family of God.⁹⁶ While the distinction between Jesus as the unique Son of God and believers as sons and daughters of God in Christ is not obliterated (e.g., Jn 20:17), believers nonetheless become in a real, spiritual sense brothers and sisters of Jesus as well as of one another. “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Heb 2:11 NIV). Even fruitfulness is to some extent transmogrified from physical childbearing to the harmonious, productive operation

⁹² What is more, in the ancient world, prior to social security and health care systems, sons were also an economic necessity for women. On infertility and the Bible, see Judith Baskin, “Rabbinic Reflections on the Barren Wife,” *HTR* 82 (1989): 101–14; Mary Callaway, *Sing O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash*, SBLDS 91 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); David Daube, *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977); and John Van Seters, “The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel,” *JBL* 87 (1968): 401–8. Regarding contemporary implications, see the discussion below.

⁹³ Contra Loughlin, “The Want of Family in Postmodernity,” p. 323, who contends that “procreation, though natural, is an inessential part of marriage” (quoting Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 3/4 [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961], p. 266). Opposing the comment that married couples need a good reason for not having children, Loughlin writes that, “[t]o the contrary, Christian couples need a good reason *for* having children, since faith in the resurrected Christ frees them from the necessity to reproduce . . .” (p. 323, n. 48). However, there is no scriptural evidence that Christ “frees” believers from “the necessity to reproduce” (a potentially misleading phrase). No dichotomy must be erected between God’s created order and life in Christ. Paul’s teaching on marriage and parenting in Eph 5 and his qualifications for church leaders in 1 Tim 3 and Tit 1, for instance, clearly (re)affirm marriage and children as the general norm for believers (see also 1 Tim 2:15; 4:3; and so on).

⁹⁴ Gen 3:15; cf. Isa 7:14; 8:8; Gal 3:16, 19.

⁹⁵ Eph 1:5; Rom 8:23. See further the discussion below.

⁹⁶ Cf. Jn 1:12–13; Rom 8:14–17; Gal 3:23–36; 4:4–7; Eph 1:5; 1 John 3:1–2. See esp. Edmund P. Clowney, “Interpreting the Biblical Models of the Church: A Hermeneutical Deepening of Ecclesiology,” *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), pp. 75–76, who also refers to Eph 3:14; 2 Cor 6:18; Mt 12:49–50; 23:28; and 1 Jn 4:21.

of the various members of the body of Christ according to the spiritual gifts supplied by God the Spirit.⁹⁷

This does not mean that in Christ the family as such has ceased to exist or is of no or little importance. Surely Karl Barth's view is extreme that "the idea of the family is of no interest at all for Christian theology."⁹⁸ While the church as eschatological entity in some sense transcends natural ties—just as discipleship transcends family obligations in the teaching of Jesus—it embraces and undergirds rather than quenches or obliterates people's natural relationships. In his Spirit, Christ dignifies marriage and the family and enables husband and wife as well as children to be restored to God's original design prior to the Fall (cf., e.g., the reference to being filled with the Spirit in Eph 5:18 in relation to 5:21–33); in his church, he provides a larger framework for these Spirit-filled Christian entities to begin to flesh out the vision of a redeemed humanity under God in Christ that will be fully realized in the eternal state. Rather than being diminished in significance, families are thus rather elevated by being incorporated in God's grand program of "summing up all things in Christ" (Eph 1:10 NASB).

Jesus. In Jesus' day, the extended family lived together (e.g., Mk 1:30), typically sharing a three or four-room home. Like their mother, daughters were to take a domestic role (Mt 10:35; Lk 12:53), and boys were to emulate their father's example according to the maxim "like father, like son." Jesus himself learned his father's trade as a craftsman (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3). The variety of terms used in the New Testament for "child"—such as *brephos*, *pais*, *paidion*, *paidarion*, *teknon*, *teknion*, or *nēpios*—indicates an awareness of the child in its social setting and stages of development.⁹⁹ Jesus himself modeled obedience in relation to his earthly parents (Lk 2:51) and supremely toward his heavenly Father (e.g., Mk 14:36; cf. Heb 5:8).

Jesus' earthly ministry intersected with children at a number of occasions. Repeatedly, Jesus restored children to their parents by way of miraculous healing: Jairus's daughter in Mark 5:21–24, 35–43; the daughter of a Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24–30; and a demon-possessed boy in Mark 9:14–29.¹⁰⁰ In one instance, Jesus puts a child in the disciples' midst and uses it to teach on the nature of discipleship (Mk 9:36–37 par.). This must have been startling for Jesus' audience, since then as now it would have been uncommon for adults to think they could learn anything from a child. At another juncture, children are brought to Jesus to receive a blessing from him (Mk 10:13–16 par.).¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ 1 Cor 12–14; Rom 12; Eph 4. On the preceding two paragraphs, see Ray Anderson, "God Bless the Children—and the Childless," *Christianity Today* 31 (7 August 1987): 28.

⁹⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 3/4, p. 241, cited in Loughlin, "The Want of Family in Postmodernity," p. 324.

⁹⁹ Cf. Francis, "Children and Childhood in the New Testament," p. 67, with reference to H. R. Weber, *Jesus and the Children* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979), pp. 52–53.

¹⁰⁰ See esp. Stephen C. Barton, "Child, Children," *DJG*, pp. 100–104; and Francis, "Children and Childhood in the New Testament," pp. 65–85 (note further bibliographic references to childhood in the ancient world on p. 66 n. 2 and to childhood and the teaching of Jesus on p. 72 n. 12).

¹⁰¹ See J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Why Jesus Blessed the Children (Mk 10.13–16 Par.)," *NovT* 25 (1983): 1–18; J. I. H. McDonald, "Receiving and Entering the Kingdom: A Study of Mk 10.15," *SE VI* (1973): 328–32.

Clearly, the climactic pronouncement, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mk 10:15 NIV), ties together the earlier-recorded instances of Jesus’ receptivity toward children with an important characteristic of the kingdom, a humble lack of regard for one’s own supposed status (cf. Lk 22:26 NIV: “Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest”). For Jesus, there is no better way to illustrate God’s free, unmerited grace than pointing to a child.¹⁰² For unlike many adults, children are generally entirely unpretentious about receiving a gift. Moreover, “little ones,” that is, the least regardless of age, are a repeated focus in Jesus’ teaching on discipleship (Mt 18:5; Lk 9:48).¹⁰³ Indeed, “the Kingdom . . . consists of the childlike,”¹⁰⁴ a lesson yet to be learned by Jesus’ reluctant followers.

In sayings preserved by Matthew, Jesus focuses even more specifically on the sense of dependency and trust that are characteristic of children and that are also traits essential for those who would enter his kingdom. In Matthew 11:25–26, Jesus praises the Father for concealing his truth from the self-proclaimed wise and understanding and revealing it to little children. This statement turns out to be prophetic when in Matthew 21:15 the children are shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (NIV) while the chief priests and the teachers of the law are indignant at the sight of the children’s praise of Jesus and of “the wonderful things he did.” Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:25–26 are further developed in his later pronouncement that people are not to call anyone “father” on earth, for there is only one Father, the one in heaven (Mt 23:9).

According to Jesus, the quality in children that is most emblematic of kingdom virtues is their humility. Unless an individual therefore turns and becomes like a child, he will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:3). While children may not necessarily be humble—much less “innocent”—their lack of status and their dependence on others make them suitable illustrations of the need for would-be candidates for Jesus’ kingdom to “become nothing” and be stripped of their earthly status (cf. Phil 2:6–7). Hence they embody Jesus’ radical call for discipleship and his requirement for his followers to “take up their cross” in total self-abandonment (e.g. Mk 8:34–38 [NIV] par.).

Francis lists several other ways in which children came to typify desirable attitudes in believers in the early church: as an image representing the needy, the “little ones” who are members of the church;¹⁰⁵ as a “metaphor for learning in expressing the relationship of pupil to teacher as child to parent”;¹⁰⁶ and as a symbol of hope and new beginning¹⁰⁷ in association with imagery of birthing as a new creation, be it in elaboration of the pupil-teacher relationship¹⁰⁸ or with reference to the

¹⁰² Cf. Francis, “Children and Childhood in the New Testament,” p. 75, who correlates this to the recollection of Israel’s own experience with God in passages such as Deut 7:7–8; Hos 11:1–4; Ezek 16:3–8; Ps 74:21.

¹⁰³ For bibliography on children in Luke’s Gospel, see *ibid.*, p. 78, nn. 26 and 27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁵ Mk 9:42; Mt 18:6–14; cf. Acts 20:35.

¹⁰⁶ Mk 10:24b; 2 Cor 12:14; 1 Tim 1:2; 1 Jn 2:1.

¹⁰⁷ Is 9:6 cf. Lk 2:12–14.

birth pangs of the messianic age.¹⁰⁹ Also, as “little children,” believers are to love one another (Jn 13:33).

In his personal experience, Jesus knew spiritual rejection even within his own family¹¹⁰ and asserted that his own primary loyalty and that of his followers must be to God the Father.¹¹¹ Thus, while Jesus affirmed natural relations, such as the divine institution of marriage and the need to honor one’s parents,¹¹² he acknowledged the higher calling of discipleship. One’s commitment to truth may lead to division, not peace, in one’s natural family,¹¹³ and in this case following Jesus must take precedence.¹¹⁴

Paul. In light of the high value placed on procreation in the foundational creation narrative, Paul teaches that the woman is to devote herself primarily to “childbearing,” that is, her domestic role related to the upbringing of children and managing of the home (1 Tim 2:15).¹¹⁵ Thus motherhood is not only not disparaged in biblical teaching (as it often is today), it is held up as the woman’s highest calling and privilege. For this reason women’s responsibility can be summed up by one biblical writer as follows: “to love their husbands and children, . . ., to be busy at home, . . ., and to be subject to their husbands” (Tit 2:4 NIV). Another important parental obligation is that of providing for their children’s future, as Paul’s aphorism in 2 Corinthians 12:14 makes clear: “After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children” (NIV). Conversely, if necessary, children ought to assume the responsibility of caring for their aging parents, for “if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8 NIV).

In a spiritual sense, Paul teaches that believers are adopted into God’s family as his sons and daughters.¹¹⁶ Rather than draw on the notion of divine adoption in Graeco-Roman mythology or the Roman ceremony of *adoptio* (in which a minor was transferred from the authority of his natural to that of his adoptive father), the apostle develops this concept by appropriating Old Testament exodus typology and the messianic adoption formula in 2 Samuel 7:14 (“I will be a father to him,

¹⁰⁸ Gal 4:19.

¹⁰⁹ Jn 16:21; Rom 8:22; 1 Thess 5:3; Rev 12:2; cf. Is 26:16–19; 66:7–14. Francis, “Children and Childhood in the New Testament,” 79. Francis also notes negative connotations conveyed by children in the New Testament—but remarkably not in Jesus’ teaching—such as lack of maturity (p. 80).

¹¹⁰ Mk 3:21; 6:1–6a; Jn 7:1–9.

¹¹¹ Lk 2:49; Mk 3:31–35.

¹¹² Mk 10:8–9, 19 par.

¹¹³ Mt 10:34.

¹¹⁴ Lk 9:57–62. Cf. S. C. Barton, “Family,” *DJG*, pp. 226–29.

¹¹⁵ This pronouncement is almost unbearable for some contemporary scholars, such as Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), p. 122, who write, “It is theologically and morally outrageous when this ‘Pauline’ author argues that a woman ‘will be saved through childbearing’ (1 Tim. 2:15).” For a detailed treatment of the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:15, see my “Ascertaining Women’s God-Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15,” *BBR* 7 (1997): 107–44.

¹¹⁶ Gal 4:5; Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4. See especially James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ in the Corpus Paulinum*, WUNT 2.48 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992).

and he will be a son to me,” NASB) within the context of new covenant theology. Just as Israel was redeemed and received her covenant privileges at the exodus (cf. Ex 4:22; Hos 11:1), so New Testament believers were redeemed from their slavery to sin in and through Christ, receiving their adoption as God’s children.¹¹⁷ Significantly, this will be fully realized only in the future at the final resurrection (Rom 8:23).

As to children, their obedience was considered vital by both Jesus and Paul, in keeping with first-century notions. Yet such obedience could not be assumed to arise naturally but must be inculcated from childhood. Ultimately, the standing and honor of the entire family were at stake. What is more, the hand of divine blessing could be withdrawn if God’s commandment to honor one’s parents and his injunction for parents to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord were disregarded. Thus the man of God must see to it “that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Tim 3:4 NIV). Nevertheless, while trying to do their best, parents must recognize their own limitations and acknowledge that God alone is the perfect Father (Heb 12:5–11).

Above all, fathers must not be overly harsh or provoke their children (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). This calls for wisdom. A balance must be struck between proper discipline and loving nurture and support. Neither the “encouraging parent” who neglects to discipline his child nor the strict disciplinarian fulfills the biblical ideal of parenting. Paul sought to strike just such a balance when he wrote to the Thessalonian believers that, on the one hand, he and his associates had sought to be “gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children” (1 Thess 2:7 NIV) and, on the other hand, that they had “dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God” (1 Thess 2:11–12 NIV). God’s ideal is a godly father and a godly mother complementing one another in raising children in proper discipline and love.

Contemporary implications. There is perhaps no one who can better appreciate the value of children today than a woman who is unable to conceive and who desperately wants to have children of her own. Not that childless couples or single persons are not in the will of God or cannot make significant contributions to the kingdom; physical fruitfulness is but a part of God’s overall desire for humans to be fruitful, which includes spiritual fruitfulness as well.¹¹⁸ As Jesus told his followers, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. . . . I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (Jn 15:8, 16 NIV). This applies to single persons and childless couples as well as to married people.

Nevertheless, the bearing and raising of children remains a vital part of the divine design for men and women today. God’s overarching plan for humanity to “be fruitful and multiply” has numerous contemporary implications covering a wide range of issues such as abortion,

¹¹⁷ Cf. 2 Cor 6:18 citing 2 Sam 7:14. For a concise summary, see Scott, “Adoption,” in *DPL*, pp. 15–18.

¹¹⁸ For contemporary implications with regard to marriage and the family, see esp. Part II in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), a volume reflecting the editor’s concerns as first articulated in “Marriage and Family Life as Christian Concerns,” *ExpTim* 106.3 (1994): 69–74.

contraception, infertility, in-vitro fertilization, surrogate parenting, artificial insemination, and adoption, to name but a few.¹¹⁹ A few general remarks must suffice. First, it should be noted that inability to have children does not necessarily indicate God's disfavor.¹²⁰ Barrenness is one of many effects of humanity's fall into sin. As Paul states in the book of Romans, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:22–23 NIV). Unfortunately, however, redemption in Christ, while bestowing the divine gift of eternal life (Rom 6:23), does not yet reverse these general consequences. Believers may still desire to have children but not be able to do so without any fault of their own.

With the advances of modern medicine, childless couples have a much wider array of options than used to be the case (see the issues mentioned above). The vast field of medical ethics applied to issues facing contemporary Christians deals with these kinds of questions. Owing to space constraints I can only refer the interested reader to selected publications in this area.¹²¹ The duties of parents and children are further taken up in the following excursus as part of the discussion of the adaptation of the household code by several New Testament writers.

EXCURSUS: THE ANCIENT HOUSEHOLD

Unlike the modern household, ancient households would not only include a married couple and children but other dependents, such as slaves, as well, with the head of the household as holding authority to which wife, children, and slaves were to submit. The New Testament features several adaptations of the Graeco-Roman "household code" (esp. Eph 5:21–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1), a device that addresses the various members of the household as to their duties, usually progressing from the "lesser" (i.e., the one under authority) to the "greater" (i.e., the one in a position of authority).¹²² The underlying assumption of this code is that order in the household will promote order on a larger societal scale as well. Believers' conformance to the ethical standards of such a code would render Christianity respectable in the surrounding culture and aid in the church's

¹¹⁹ On ancient Jewish attitudes toward abortion, see Keener, "Marriage," *DNTB*, p. 681. On contraception, see John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Angus S. McLaren, *A History of Contraception* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

¹²⁰ Cf. Anderson, "God Bless the Children—and the Childless," p. 28.

¹²¹ On birth control, see Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 200–225, whose discussion is considerably more nuanced than that of Mary Pride, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1985), who advocates letting God give a couple as many children as he desires by practicing no birth control. On infertility, see Martha Stout, *Without Child: A Compassionate Look at Infertility* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1985) and Kaye Halverson, *The Wedded Unmother* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980).

¹²² Cf. David L. Balch, "Household Codes," in *Graeco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres*, ed. David E. Aune, SLBSBS 21 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); idem, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981); Craig S. Keener, "Family and Household," in *DNTB*, pp. 353–68; idem, "Marriage," *DNTB*, p. 687; and Philip H. Towner, "Households and Household Codes," in *DPL*, pp. 417–19, who also notes the related passages 1 Tim 2:1–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2, 17–19; Tit 2:1–3:8; and 1 Pet 2:13–3:7; idem, "Household Codes," in *DLNTD*, pp. 513–20; and James D. G. Dunn, "The Household Rules in the New Testament," in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 43–63 (list on pp. 44–46, bibliography on p. 49, nn. 7–8).

evangelistic mission.¹²³

The Christian duties of wives and husbands were already discussed under “Marital roles” above.¹²⁴ It remains to treat the responsibilities of children and parents in greater detail than was possible above. At the outset, it should be noted that children are often presented as metaphorical for those who are deficient in understanding (1 Cor 3:1–4; Heb 5:13). In 1 Corinthians 13:11–12, Paul contrasts adulthood with childhood as the stage of entering into maturity. Believers must “no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (Eph 4:14 NIV); together, they must grow up in Christ (Eph 4:15).

The major Pauline injunction on the role of parents and children is found in Ephesians 6:1–4, where the apostle writes,

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Fathers [or parents], do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (NIV)

The apostle’s words in Colossians 3:20 are similar: “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (NIV) Notably, in the more extensive passage in Ephesians, Paul roots children’s obligation to obey their parents in the Old Testament Decalogue.¹²⁵ Disobedience to parents was considered to be a phenomenon characteristic of the end times (Mk 13:12; 2 Tim 3:1–2), which would draw divine judgment (Rom 1:30, 32). Children’s responsibility to honor their parents also entailed caring for them in their old age (1 Tim 5:8). This was viewed as proper repayment for having been reared by them (1 Tim 5:4).

Fathers, in turn, were to provide for their children (2 Cor 12:14) and to ensure proper nurture and discipline (*paideia*), which involved formal and informal education (2 Cor 12:14) and various forms of discipline, including physical discipline.¹²⁶ A father commanded great respect, but he was not to use his position of authority to exasperate his children but to display gentleness in his treatment of them.¹²⁷ As will be developed further below, the skills required to manage one’s private household were considered to be the very ones also necessary for governing in a public setting (1 Tim 3:4–5).

It is an indication of the powerful dynamics of natural father-child relations that this kind of

¹²³ 1 Tim 3:7; 6:1; Tit 2:5, 8, 10; 3:8; 1 Pet 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:12.

¹²⁴ On gender roles in Palestinian and geographically related Jewish traditions, see Keener, “Marriage,” *DNTB*, p. 690, who notes that wives’s standard duties in first-century Palestine were largely domestic: grinding wheat, cooking, washing, nursing, and sewing (*m. Ketub. 5:5*).

¹²⁵ Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16. Note also Jesus’ reference to the fifth commandment in Mt 15:4 par. Mk 7:10 (as well as to negative consequences for disobedience in Ex 21:17 par. Lev 20:9).

¹²⁶ Prov 13:24; Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19; cf. Sir 3:23; 30:1–3, 12.

¹²⁷ 1 Cor 4:15, 21; 1 Thess 2:11; Eph 6:4.

language was applied also to older and younger men who were not biologically related. Thus younger men could call older men “fathers” and older men could address younger men as “sons.” Teachers likewise might refer to their disciples as children (Jn 13:33; 21:5; 3 Jn 4), while disciples might call their teachers “fathers” (2 Kgs 2:12; Mt 23:9).

One of the primary roles of women was that of childbearing (1 Tim 2:15; 5:14). At times nurses were employed to care for infants.¹²⁸ In the same way, mothers, including widows (1 Tim 5:4, 8), were to be honored by their children just as were fathers.¹²⁹ Their relationship with their sons was often particularly close, as in the case of Mary and Jesus¹³⁰ or the widow’s son, “the only son of his mother” (Lk 7:12). As in the case of older men, older women were to be treated with respect (1 Tim 5:1–2). They also had the important obligation to mentor younger women with regard to their family responsibilities (Tit 2:3–5).¹³¹

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The qualifications for church leadership stipulated in the Pastoral Epistles give prominent coverage to an applicant’s marriage and family life. In 1 Timothy 3:1–13, the primary passage on the subject, it is required that both overseers and deacons be “faithful husbands” (*mias gynaikas andra*);¹³² that overseers keep their children under control with all dignity; and that they manage their own household well.¹³³ For, according to Pauline logic, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” (1 Tim 3:5 NIV). Indeed, as the apostle makes clear later in the same chapter, the church is “*God’s household*” (1 Tim 3:15).¹³⁴ There is thus a close relationship between church and family, and Christian maturity in the fulfillment of one’s duties as husband and father becomes one of the most essential requirements for those aspiring to the office of pastor or elder.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ See the imagery employed in 1 Cor 3:1–2; 1 Thess 2:7(?). Cf. Keener, “Family and Household,” *DNTB*, p. 360.

¹²⁹ Note that Lev 19:3 even mentions mothers before fathers, a fact that did not escape later Jewish rabbis (see references in Keener, “Family and Household,” *DNTB*, p. 355).

¹³⁰ Lk 2:48–51; Jn 2:1–5; 19:25–27.

¹³¹ On slaves as members of the ancient household, see esp. Keener, “Family and Household,” *DNTB*, pp. 361–66.

¹³² 1 Tim 3:2, 12; cf. Tit 1:6. For a defense of this interpretation, see my forthcoming volume on the Pastoral Epistles in the New Expositor’s Bible Commentary. Contra the NIV’s “the husband of but one wife”: there is no equivalent for “but” in the original (but note the commendable change in the TNIV: “faithful to his wife”). Cf. Stephen M. Baugh, “Titus,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 3:501–2, who contends that, since polygamy was rather uncommon in the first century in the Graeco-Roman world, Paul more likely prohibited church leaders from having concubines, a widespread practice at that time. According to Baugh, neither the Greeks nor the Romans regarded these practices as adulterous or polygamous. For Paul, however, concubinage was the same as polygamy, since he considered sexual union to be tantamount to marital union (cf. 1 Cor. 6:16).

¹³³ 1 Tim 3:4 (cf. Tit 1:6); 1 Tim 3:5.

¹³⁴ See Vern S. Poythress, “The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), pp. 233–47.

¹³⁵ The terms “pastor,” “overseer,” and “elder” are used somewhat interchangeably in the New Testament (cf., e.g.,

The implications of this are, first, that younger candidates who have yet to prove their ability to manage their own households well should ordinarily not be put in ultimate leadership positions in the church. They may possess proper formal training as well as be both eager and otherwise qualified in terms of character and disposition. However, maturity and life experience are such an integral part of a church leader's necessary equipment for his role that any diminishing of this requirement may come dangerously close to appointing a recent convert, which is discouraged in Scripture in the strongest terms (1 Tim 3:6; cf. 5:22).

Second, it is utter folly for someone to provide qualified, capable leadership for the church while neglecting his duties in his own family, be it owing to busyness in ministry or to improper priorities. Even while serving as pastor or elder, it is therefore imperative that men serving in this function regularly evaluate themselves to see whether they are able to oversee the church while continuing to be able adequately to fulfill their natural duties as husband and father. Otherwise, it may well be said with Paul that those men beware, lest possibly, after having preached to others, they may themselves be disqualified (1 Cor 9:27).

Third, theologically, by linking the family so closely to the church, the New Testament presents the latter as the eschatological extension of the former. That is, that which reaches all the way back to the divine creation of the first man and woman is seen to be further extended and explicated in the "household of God," the church (cf. Eph 5:31–32).

One further issue (already touched upon above) must be taken up at this point: the question of whether or not divorced people may serve as elders or pastors. I believe that 1 Timothy 3 and related passages do not directly address this, focusing instead on the requirement of a candidate's faithfulness in a present marriage. In keeping with the general principles outlined above, if such a person's divorce was legitimate, there seems to be no immediate reason why he should be disqualified from consideration. If the divorce was illegitimate, service as elder or overseer is ruled out. However, even if the divorce was legitimate, the issue of a person's reputation with those outside the church should be considered, especially since there are many other avenues of service apart from the highest ecclesiastical office. Nonetheless, people should generally not be held to a stricter standard just to be "safe" and "conservative." If both Jesus and Paul were willing to make an exception, we should be willing to follow their lead without fearing that a high view of marriage will thereby be compromised.

MARRIAGE, THE FAMILY AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

One final topic remains, that of marriage, the family and spiritual warfare. While there is a plethora of materials on marriage and the family, as well as a considerable body of literature on spiritual warfare,¹³⁶ rarely are those issues treated jointly. Thus I am aware of no current volume on marriage and the family that provides even the most cursory treatment of spiritual warfare.¹³⁷

Acts 20:17, 28; Tit 1:5–7).

¹³⁶ See esp. Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1997); idem, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Leicester/Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1992); Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995); and the articles on "Elements/Elemental Spirits of the World," "Power," and "Principalities and Powers" in

Regularly, the focus is on fulfilling one's partner's needs in marriage, improving one's communication skills or resolving marital conflict. From reading any of these books, one would never know that spiritual warfare is a vital issue in marriage and the family.

Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Spiritual warfare has been a part of married life and childrearing almost from the beginning. The foundational biblical narrative in Genesis 3 recounts how the tempter, Satan, prevailed upon the first woman to violate God's commandment, and how her husband followed her into sin. Ever since, marriage has resembled more a struggle for control and conscious or unconscious efforts at mutual manipulation than an Edenic paradise. The first known instance of sibling rivalry issued in Cain killing his brother Abel out of envy and jealousy. The rest of the Pentateuch chronicles a whole series of ways in which sin has affected marital and family relationships ever since the Fall.

A particularly egregious example in Israel's history is king David, whose sin with Bathsheba is recounted in 2 Samuel 11. David, being idle while others went to war, succumbed to sexual temptation, committed adultery, and even murder, and his reign was never the same. The child born as a result of his adultery died. When rebuked by Nathan, he repented, but trouble never left his house again. His son Absalom rose up against his father; his son Solomon had multiple wives who led him into idolatry (1 Kings 11), and his kingdom was divided. From then on Israel's history takes a sharp downturn, with the nation still languishing under foreign domination when Jesus appears on the scene.

The message of the New Testament is no different. Arguably the most important treatment of spiritual warfare, Ephesians 6:10–20, is preceded by an extended treatment of marriage (Eph 5:21–33) and childrearing (Eph 6:1–4). Unfortunately, these sections are regularly compartmentalized. In Paul's thinking, however, it is precisely in people's relationships with one another, be it at work or at home, among Christians or between believers and unbelievers, that spiritual warfare manifests itself and conscious dealing with it becomes a necessity. In fact, Ephesians 6:10–20 is "a crucial element to which the rest of the epistle has been pointing."¹³⁸ The main command governing Paul's treatment of marriage and the family in Ephesians 5:21–6:4 is, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18).¹³⁹ The warfare passage in Ephesians 6:10–18 seamlessly picks up where Ephesians 5:18 left off, calling on believers to take up the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17), to pray in the Spirit (Eph 6:18), always remembering that their "struggle is not against flesh

DPL, pp. 229–33, 723–25, 746–52.

¹³⁷ The only partial exception is Evelyn Christenson, *What Happens When We Pray For Our Families* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Family Publishers, 1992). There is no discussion of spiritual warfare in such popular books on marriage as Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield, 1995); Kay Arthur's *The Marriage Builder* by Larry Crabb, *A Marriage Without Regrets* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 2000); Willard Harley's *His Needs, Her Needs* (Ada, Mich.: Revell, 1990); *The Language of Love* by Gary Smalley and John Trent (Pomona, Calif.: Focus on the Family, 1988), and Laura Walker's *Dated Jekyll, Married Hyde* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997). There is nothing in best-selling books on parenting such as *Relational Parenting* by Ross Campbell (Chicago: Moody Publishing, 2000), *Raising Heaven-bound Kids in a Hell-bent World* by Eastman Curtis (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), *Children at Risk* by James Dobson and Gary Bauer (Dallas: Word, 1990), or *The Gift of Honor* by Gary Smalley and John Trent (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987).

¹³⁸ O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, p. 457.

¹³⁹ See my treatment of this passage, "What Does It Mean To Be Filled With the Spirit?" pp. 229–40.

and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12 NIV).¹⁴⁰

There are several indications elsewhere in the New Testament in both Paul’s writings and those of others that the devil’s efforts to destroy marriages and to subvert family life did not stop at the fall but continue to this very day. In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul counsels believers not to abstain from sexual relations, “except by mutual consent and for a time” (NIV) for the purpose of prayer, but then to come together again, so Satan may not tempt them because of their lack of self-control. This would seem to indicate that the sexual component of the marriage relationship is very much a regular target of Satan’s attack and must be carefully guarded by the married couple.¹⁴¹ Another Pauline passage is Ephesians 4:26–27: “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (NIV). While not limited to marriage, this pronouncement certainly includes the marriage relationship, cautioning believers not to allow broken relationships to render them vulnerable to the devil.

Yet another relevant passage is found in Peter’s writings. “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Pet 3:7 NIV). Here it is insensitivity on the part of the husband toward his wife that is mentioned as the potential cause for spiritual disruption in the family, and marital discord becomes a hindrance to united, answerable prayer.¹⁴² Whether it is the couple’s sex life, unresolved conflict, or inconsiderateness, the New Testament makes clear that all are to be seen in the arena of spiritual warfare, with proper precautions needing to be taken.

Now what is the key element in spiritual warfare? According to Scripture, it is human minds. “But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your *minds* may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:3 NIV, emphasis added). “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every *thought* to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:3–5 NIV, emphasis added). Just as Satan reasoned with Eve as to why she should disobey God

¹⁴⁰ On Eph 6:10–20 in the context of the letter of Ephesians as a whole, see esp. the writings of Peter T. O’Brien: *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), pp. 109–31; *Letter to the Ephesians*, pp. 456–90, esp. pp. 457–60; and Andreas J. Köstenberger and P. T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A biblical theology of mission*, NSBT 11 (Leicester/Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 196–98.

¹⁴¹ On the Corinthian background to 1 Cor 7 and for an exposition of 1 Cor 7:5, see esp. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 266–83.

¹⁴² The question of whether it is only the husband’s prayers (probably the immediate focus) or the couples’ prayers (the necessary implication) that are hindered need not concern us here (see the relevant commentary literature; e.g. P. H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990], p. 123, n. 20). In the end, it is clearly the prayers of the entire couple that are negatively affected by the husband’s insensitivity toward his wife.

in the Garden, it is people's thought life that is the arena in which our spiritual battles are won or lost. I conclude with three important principles pertaining to spiritual warfare and marriage.

First, an awareness of the fact that there is a battle is imperative for success. Anyone who, in the case of war, fails to realize that he is in it will no doubt be an early casualty owing to his failure to properly protect himself. It is the same in the realm of marriage and the family. Arguably, divorce rates are skyrocketing, not because of the lack of good intentions, the unavailability of resources and instruction on how to conduct a strong biblical marriage, or even the lack of love, but because many, unbelievers and believers alike, inadequately recognize that spiritual warfare is a certain reality that calls for a concerted, deliberately planned response.

Second, it is essential to know one's spiritual enemy. This enemy is not one's marriage partner. Nor is it one's children. It is Satan, the enemy of our souls, who employs a variety of strategies, methods, and schemes. While he is highly intelligent, he nonetheless remains a creature. Thus he is neither omniscient nor omnipresent; God and Satan are not evenly matched. The devil can, and in fact, does miscalculate—the most striking instance being the cross, when what Satan thought would be his greatest triumph was turned into his final defeat three days later when Jesus rose from the dead. Satan specifically targets people's areas of weakness and greatest vulnerability, and every individual must be prepared for this in order not to be caught off guard. Yet like Paul, so believers today will find that God's grace is more than sufficient for every challenge they face in the power of Christ, as long as they are diligent to "put on the full armor of God" (Eph 6:11).

Third and finally, spiritual battles must be fought by the use of proper weapons. As mentioned, some lose a spiritual conflict in which they are engaged because they fail to realize that they are in fact embroiled in such. Yet others may realize they are in a war but fail to use proper spiritual weapons. Once again, such persons will soon become casualties. In the context of Christian marriages, as well as in parenting, it is imperative that believers, in order to overcome a spiritual enemy—be it their own sinfulness or evil supernatural opposition—employ spiritual weapons: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer (Eph 6:10–18). As Peter writes, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith. . . . (1 Pet 5:8–9 NIV).

As Christians are engaged in spiritual conflict, they must embrace the truth that there is in fact a spiritual battle raging; they must strive to know their enemy, the devil; and they must fight using proper, spiritual weapons. The apostle Paul wrote, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. . . . Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Eph 6:12–13 NIV). Spiritual warfare is the all-encompassing, ruling reality for all marital and family relationships. Those who ignore it do so at their own peril. Just as the devil attacks those with potential for church leadership, he seeks to subvert human marriages, because they have the greatest potential for showing the world the nature of the relationship between Christ and his church (Eph 5:31–32). If believers want to show the world by their marriages what a glorious and good God they have, they must, for God's sake as well as their own, engage in spiritual warfare, and they must do so using spiritual weapons. Then, and only then, will Christian marriages and families reflect the image and design of the Creator.

CONCLUSION

In the above discussion, we have highlighted the following biblical teachings regarding marriage, the family, and related subjects. Human sexuality and relationships were seen to be rooted in the eternal will of the Creator as expressed in the way in which God made men and women. Man and woman are made in God's image (Gen 1:27), called to representative rule (Gen 1:28) involving procreation, whereby the man, as first-created, has ultimate responsibility before God, with the woman placed alongside him as his "suitable helper" (Gen 2:18, 20). The Fall led to serious consequences affecting both the man and the woman individually in their areas of involvement as well as the marital relationship. Men's work and the relational sphere of women have both been significantly affected and turned into a struggle for control. Nevertheless, the image of God in man is not eradicated, and marriage and the family continue as the primary divinely instituted order for the human race.

From creation it also becomes clear that heterosexuality, rather than homosexuality, is God's pattern for men and women. The sexes are created in distinctness, which must not be blurred or obliterated, and humanity exists as male and female for the purpose of complementarity and procreation, neither of which can be properly (or at all) realized in same-sex (sexual) relationships. Moreover, the divine image was seen to be imprinted on man *as male and female*, so that homosexual unions fall short of reflecting God's own likeness as unity in diversity. It is for these reasons that Scripture universally views homosexuality in terms of rebellion against God and disregard for his creation order.

In keeping with the roles established by the Creator in the beginning, the New Testament defines marital roles in terms of both respect and love as well as submission and authority. While the husband and the wife are fellow heirs of God's grace (1 Pet 3:7) and while "there is no male nor female" as far as salvation in Christ is concerned (Gal 3:28), there remains a pattern in which the wife is to emulate the church's submission to Christ and the husband is to imitate Christ's love for the church (Eph 5:21–33).¹⁴³ Thus a complementarian understanding of gender roles is borne out, not just by a few isolated problem passages but by biblical theology as a whole.¹⁴⁴ Apart from their joint stewardship, the married couple has an important witnessing function in the surrounding culture and ought to understand itself within the larger framework of God's eschatological purposes in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10).

Because marriage is a divinely ordained institution rather than merely a human contractual agreement, divorce likewise is permissible only in certain carefully delineated exceptional cases. These include sexual marital unfaithfulness (adultery) as well as desertion by an unbeliever. Even in those cases, however, reconciliation is to be the aim, and divorce, while permissible, remains the less preferable option. Where divorce is biblically legitimate, however, so is remarriage. The

¹⁴³ On Gal 3:28, see esp. Richard Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1999); Köstenberger, "Gender Passages in the NT: Hermeneutical Fallacies Critiqued," pp. 273–79.

¹⁴⁴ See Köstenberger, "Gender Passages in the NT," 259–83.

latter is *apropos* also in case of spousal death, “only in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39 NASB). Another scenario different from marriage is that of singleness, which may present itself as pre-married stage, widow or widowerhood, or a permanent unmarried state. While pre-marrieds are to refrain from sexual relations prior to entering into marriage, and while widowed individuals are permitted, in certain cases even encouraged, to remarry, permanent singleness, i.e. celibacy, is considered by both Jesus and Paul to be a special gift from God, though not a necessary requirement for church office (cf. 1 Tim 3:2, 12). By promoting undistracted devotion to the Lord, singleness can actually be a unique opportunity for kingdom service (1 Cor 7:32–35).

The bearing and raising of children is part of God’s plan for marriage. Children are a blessing from the Lord, while barrenness is generally viewed as sign of divine disfavor. Parents are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4), and women are to place special priority on their God-given calling as mothers and homemakers (1 Tim 2:15; Tit 2:4–5).

Faithfulness in marriage, obedient children, and proper household management are also considered paramount among the requirements for church leaders in the Pastoral epistles (see esp. 1 Tim 3:2–5). For there is a close link between the family and the church, which is God’s “household” (1 Tim 3:15), so that only those who are good husbands and fathers and who give adequate attention to managing their own homes are qualified to provide leadership also for the church.

The New Testament—indeed, the entire Bible—presents a coherent body of teachings pertaining to marriage and the family. Jesus, the early church, and Paul all upheld a very high standard in this crucial area of life. Sexual purity was to be maintained in all human relationships, and marriage alone was considered to be the legitimate realm for sexual activity. In this as well as in other areas Christianity, in the first century as today, towers above pagan cultures and displays the character of a holy God in the lives and relationships of his people.