

THE GOD WHO ORDAINED IT ALL:

On Marriage, Family, Gender, Sexuality, and the Church

At Fellowship Greenville, we believe the Lord has established three institutions to help ensure the flourishing of society: Church, Family, and Government. As these institutions reflect the divine design for how they should engage with one another and the God who ordained them, society benefits from the harmony that ensues. But what happens when the culture shifts and redefines the purposes for which they were created? What happens when the definitions and meanings for one or more of these institutions are changed? What happens when the absolutes upon which these institutions are ordained begin to crumble and dissolve in the midst of cultural earthquakes?

The West has been going through, is going through, and will continue to go through cultural shifts and changes that will redefine and further inculcate the way people understand the institution of marriage and family. As the understanding of marriage and family morphs, this will provide unique and challenging opportunities for the church; how we minister to families and individuals and also how we attempt to live within the rule of law – both God’s and man’s.

As a church, our highest allegiance is foremost to God and the revelation of himself that is found in his Word – the Bible. Within the character and nature of God are the foundations for all three institutions. In this document, we will not address all three institutions but will take a look at the institution of marriage and the family and the many tangential arrows that are released from that bow. The elders and leadership of Fellowship Greenville do not claim to be inerrant or without fault. We do, however, hold with unreserved reservation our commitment to God’s truth as found in his Word. There is no desire to become legalistic in our practices at Fellowship Greenville; however, we do realize that God has given specific principles and guidelines for his church and we desire to be faithful to those divine boundaries.

The Bible

The Bible isn’t a collection of loosely related “books,” but a unified work that conveys the amazing message of God’s desire for relationship with people. What this means for us as a church is that the instruction, counsel, and teaching offered by leaders at Fellowship Greenville must be clearly rooted in the truths found in the Bible. The Bible itself, not our experience or the changing impulses of our culture, is the arbitrator of truth. All aspects of life and conduct must come under the direction and guidance of what the Bible has to say about that area of life.

We believe that the Bible (or the Scriptures) originated in its entirety with God and came to us through the instrumentality of men he chose. His message was not mechanically dictated, but the writers were “carried along” by God himself in their writing. The result is that, in God’s providential grace, they wrote in human language exactly what he desired to have communicated.

Because of this process of God superintending the writing (called “inspiration”), the Bible is fully trustworthy. Except for copyists’ mistakes and errors or mistranslations, it is totally without error. The Bible is a human document only inasmuch as it was written in human language. But, the Bible is also



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a divine document in that it flawlessly communicates the very words of God to us. Thus, it is our sole and final authority on all matters of faith and practice.

Family

We believe God is the originator of the family. It was established by God in his inaugural act of the marriage between a man and a woman. Their union models God's design for marriage and perpetually stands as God's loving and righteous will for all sexual intimacy.

The Bible further defines the family through God's instruction for married couples to have children, whether by birth or by adoption. We believe the purpose of the family is to glorify and honor God by forming the spiritual, emotional, physical, and economic foundation for individuals, the church, and any society.

It is at home that children see manhood and womanhood modeled. It is at home that moral values are taught by parents and placed into the hearts of their children. It is at home that people see the reality of a relationship with Jesus Christ modeled. It is at home that people learn to live out their convictions. Therefore, we are committed to upholding the concept of family as God's original and primary means of producing a godly offspring and passing on godly values from generation to generation. (Ephesians 3:14,15; Genesis 1:26-28; Romans 8:15, 23; John 1:12; Galatians 3:29; Psalm 78:5-7; Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Marriage

We believe God, not man, created marriage. We believe marriage was the first institution designed by God. We believe the Bible teaches that the covenant of marriage is sacred and lifelong. The Bible makes it clear that marriage is a legally binding public declaration of commitment and a private consummation between one man and one woman, never between the same sex. Therefore, we believe God gives a wife to a husband and a husband to a wife, and they are to receive one another as God's unique and personal provision to help meet their mutual needs.

We believe God created marriage for the purpose of couples glorifying God as one flesh, parenting godly children, and enjoying sexual pleasure. As iron sharpens iron, we believe God uses marriage to sharpen a man and woman into the image of Jesus Christ. Just as the Trinity reflects equal worth with differing roles, we believe God created a man and a woman with equal worth but with differing roles and responsibilities in marriage.

Finally, we believe the marriage commitment must be upheld in our culture as that sacred institution of God in which men and women can experience the truest sense of spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy, so that the two can become one. No human institution has the authority to redefine marriage any more than a human institution has the authority to redefine the gospel, which marriage mysteriously reflects (Eph. 5:32). (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:30-32; 1 Corinthians 7:3; Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Mark 12:25; Proverbs 27:17; Romans 1:26-27, 8:29; Hebrews 13:4; Matthew 22:30; Deuteronomy 24:5; Song of Solomon)

HUSBANDS

We believe God has charged each husband to fulfill the responsibility of being the "head" (servant leader) of his wife. We believe God created a man incomplete, and as a husband, he needs his wife as his helper. We believe a husband will give account before God for how he has loved, served, and provided for his wife. We reject the notion that a husband is to dominate his wife. Likewise, we reject the notion that a husband is to abdicate his responsibilities to lead his wife. Rather, we believe his responsibility is to love his wife. This love is characterized by taking the initiative to serve her, care for her, and honor her as a gift from God. We believe his responsibility is to protect his wife and help provide for her physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

We also believe a husband is to seek after and highly regard his wife's opinion and counsel and treat her as the equal partner she is in Christ. Therefore, we are committed to exhort and implore men not to abuse their God-given responsibilities as husbands, but rather to initiate a sacrificial love for their wives, in the same way Jesus Christ initiated sacrificial love and demonstrated it fully on the cross. (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Timothy 5:8)

WIVES

We believe God has charged each wife to fulfill the responsibility of being her husband's "helper." We believe a wife will give account to God for how she has loved, respected, and given support to her husband. We uphold the biblical truth that she is of equal value with her husband before God. We reject the notion that a wife should assume the leadership responsibilities of her husband. Likewise, we reject the notion that a wife should passively defer to the dominance of her husband. We believe that her responsibility is to willingly and intelligently affirm, respect, and submit to her husband as the leader in the relationship and in his vocational calling. Therefore, we are committed to exhorting a wife to be in support of her husband by accepting and excelling in her responsibility as his helper. (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6; Proverbs 31:10-12)

SEXUAL UNION

We believe the Bible clearly states that marriage is the only context for sexual intimacy. We believe contemporary culture is pressing single people to engage prematurely in acts that are intended only for the context of marriage. Our culture has rejected God's plan for intimacy by promoting sexual promiscuity of various kinds and, as a consequence, has brought upon itself sexual diseases and relational dysfunctions. We believe in sexual purity and fidelity.

Therefore, we are committed to training parents to teach their children at an early age to respect their sexuality and to preserve their virginity and purity until marriage. We are committed to communicating the message to teenagers, single adults, and married couples that sexual intimacy is available only in the context of marriage. (Genesis 1:24-25; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

FATHERS

We believe God has charged a father to execute the responsibilities of a family leader. He is accountable before God to lead his family by sacrificially loving his wife and children and by providing for their physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. We believe the greatest way a father can love his children is to love their mother. We believe children gain much of their concept of God from their fathers. We believe a father should teach his children, by instruction and example, truth from the Bible and how to apply it practically in daily life. Therefore, a father should spend a quantity of time, as well as quality time, with each child.

We believe a father should demonstrate godly character revealed in humility, tenderness, and patience toward his children. We believe a father should demonstrate love by practicing consistent discipline with each child. Therefore, we are committed to turning the hearts of fathers back to their children by emphasizing the importance of their role as "father."

We are committed to exhorting every father to model a love for God and his Word, to model love for his wife, and to love his children. (Malachi 4:6; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:20-21; Deuteronomy 6:6-7; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 5:8)

MOTHERS

We believe God has uniquely designed women to be mothers. We believe the greatest way a mother can love her children is to love their father. We also believe God has created a woman with an innate and special ability to nurture and care for her children.

Therefore, we believe mothers are the primary people who execute the vital responsibilities of

loving, nurturing, and mentoring children. We believe these responsibilities should be met before a mother contemplates any other duties. We believe our culture has devalued the role of a mother by placing greater significance on activities outside the home than on those inside the home.

We realize there are cases where a mother will find it necessary to work outside the home (e.g. financial distress, single parenthood); however, we also believe some couples have made career and lifestyle choices that result in deemphasizing the mother's role as nurturer. Therefore, we are committed to presenting a biblical framework through which couples can rightly evaluate their priorities in light of a mother's role. We are committed to elevating motherhood by rightly assessing its exalted value in God's economy of the family. We are committed to exhorting mothers to model love for God and his Word, to model love for her husband, and to love her children. (Titus 2:45; 1 Thessalonians 2:7; Proverbs 14:1, 31:1-31; Deuteronomy 6:6, 11:19; Ezekiel 16:44-45)

CHILDREN

We believe children are the gifts of God and should be received and treated as such. We believe a child's life begins at conception. We believe children have a special responsibility to God in obeying and honoring their parents. We believe a child's identity and spiritual growth is either helped or hindered by his parents' devotion to God, to one another, and to him. Parents should see themselves as God's ambassadors, working to build strong character in the lives of their children through consistent godly living, nurturing, discipline, and teaching them right from wrong. We are committed to God's plan for passing his love down through the ages by encouraging parents to love their children "so the generations to come might know" the love and forgiveness of Christ. (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; Psalms 78:5-8, 127:3-6, 139:13-16; Proverbs 4:1, 6:20; Job 3:3)

CHILDLESS COUPLES

We believe God has allowed some couples to be without biological children according to his sovereign plan in their lives. We believe couples without children are of no less value before God than those with children. We believe in encouraging childless couples to consider adoption as a family alternative. We are committed to encouraging childless couples to pass on a godly legacy through involvement with children in their immediate families, churches, and communities. (Luke 1:6-7; Romans 8:28-29)

GRANDPARENTS

We believe grandparents are to be honored as valued family members. We believe their wisdom in living should be sought and passed on to their children and their children's children. We also believe that grandparents have the responsibility of teaching and modeling to their grandchildren how to know Jesus Christ and grow in a relationship with him as well as passing along biblical principles for godly living. The Old Testament is filled with examples of grandfathers and grandmothers who excelled in their roles of grandparenting.

Therefore, we are committed to giving honor to grandparents by encouraging their children and grandchildren to listen to their voices of wisdom. We are also committed to exhorting grandparents to pray for and become actively involved with children and grandchildren whenever it is possible. (1 Timothy 5:4; Genesis 18:18-19; Proverbs 17,6; Psalm 78)

Church

We believe the family and the church are interdependent. A primary responsibility of the church is to help build godly families, and godly families also help build the church. We believe the family supplies the relational rudiments of the local church. We believe the local church is the spiritual home where families should corporately worship God. It is the place where the knowledge and love of God may be communicated to fathers, mothers, and children.

Therefore, we are committed to exhorting families to support the local church through their

involvement. We are also committed to exhorting the local church to uphold the priority of helping build godly marriages and families. (1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 5:22-33; Philemon 1:2; Colossians 4:15)

Divorce

We believe God's plan for marriage is that it be a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman. We believe God hates divorce. We believe divorce brings harm to every person involved. Therefore, reconciliation of a marriage should be encouraged and divorce discouraged. We also believe that God allows for divorce in certain situations, not because he wills it, but because of the hardness of people's hearts.

We believe, however, that it is God's priority that marital oneness be restored and that, through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, forgiveness and reconciliation be experienced. We believe that in the unfortunate cases of abuse and abandonment, God has provided protection for an abused spouse and provision for child support through the church, civil law, godly counselors, prayer, and other practical measures. We believe God can restore broken people and broken marriages by his grace, by the power of his Spirit, and by his practical truths found in the Bible. (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-3; Romans 13:1-5; 1 Corinthians 7:15)

Single Parents

We believe that, ideally, a child needs the influence of both a father and mother for healthy development in life and relationships. At the same time, we recognize that God's grace is sufficient and that he is a father to the fatherless and a husband to the husbandless. We also believe he is a guardian to children without a mother and a friend to a husband who has lost his wife.

We believe God, by his grace, can use the void left from a missing parent to accomplish his eternal purposes of building Christlike character in single parents and their children. We believe a single parent and his or her children are a family and that the Bible contains principles for them to grow as a family. We believe the local church should be a home for single parents, providing their children with godly people who serve as role models in place of the missing parent.

Therefore, we are committed to exhorting Christians within the local church to creatively help meet the needs associated with single-parent homes. We are committed to comforting and encouraging families by providing resources and developing biblical principles to assist those who struggle in the role of a single parent. (Psalm 68:5-6; 1 Corinthians 7:32; James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:16; Romans 8:28-29; Luke 18:3-5)

Broken and Blended Families

We believe God has allowed men and women, either by circumstance or by choice, to endure difficult and painful consequences in their marriages and family relationships. We also believe God gives abundant grace to the broken, blended, and single-parent families.

Therefore, we believe he can and does enable them to carry out his functions and principles for healthy family life. We are committed to comforting, encouraging, and teaching these families God's principles of marriage and family life. We are also committed to exhorting the local church to help with the burden of the broken family. (James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:16; Philippians 4:13)

Work and Family

We believe work is an important and necessary aspect of one's service to God and one's

responsibility to provide for the needs of the family. We also believe security and significance cannot be found through pursuing career goals or financial achievement apart from one's responsibility to God and one's spouse and family. Instead, we believe those needs are best met in the warmth of a home where parents and children are experiencing harmony in their relationships with each other and with Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we are committed to challenging any person or couple to rearrange their priorities so that over the course of a lifetime they can be successful at home and not merely successful in their careers. (Revelation 3:14-22; Ephesians 6:7-8; Matthew 6:33; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12)

Mentors

We believe in the biblical admonition for older men and women to teach younger men and women. We believe younger couples today should seek out older couples for their wisdom and counsel in matters of marriage and family. We believe older couples should be taught and encouraged to mentor younger couples and we believe this is best accomplished through the local church. Therefore, we are committed to establishing a strategy for mentoring that the local church may implement and use to build strong marriages and families. (Titus 2:3-5)

The Deceiver and Culture

We believe there is a living Devil who is God's enemy and whose nature and objective is to lie and deceive. We believe the Devil has attacked God's plan for the family from the beginning of man until now. We believe he uses the various aspects of the culture to promote personal independence, distort the differences between men and women, confuse their roles, and elevate personal rights over marital responsibilities. We believe the Devil seeks to persuade people to move away from God's plan for intimacy and oneness and toward isolation and divorce. (John 8:44; Genesis 3; Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-18; 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 2:15)

The Believer's Posture Toward Society and Culture

The Gospel must inform our involvement with the larger community that surrounds us. The Good News is that God offers reconciliation through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. In light of that, we ought to:

- respect and pray for our governing authorities (Rom. 13:1-7);
- affirm the biblical understanding that all persons, including those identifying as LGBT, are created in the image of God and deserve dignity and respect (Genesis 1:27);
- love our neighbors regardless of whatever disagreements arise as a result of conflicting beliefs about marriage, family, and other societal issues we believe go against biblical teaching;
- live respectfully and amicably alongside those who may disagree with us for the sake of the common good;
- renounce common reactions such as sarcasm, mockery, ridicule, and disrespect to those engaged in practices that are forbidden by Scripture.

The Gospel is not, nor has it ever been, about affirming humanity in whatever expression it chooses. It is rather about the powerful grace of God toward sinners that delivers us from sin by cleansing us through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is impossible, therefore, to demonstrate the love of God, and at the same time, endorse, legitimize, or affirm conduct or behavior that brings God's condemnation on its participants.

Gender Roles in the Church

We believe God created human beings in his image as both male and female. Women and men are equally, immeasurably valuable as persons created in the image of God and as recipients of the grace of God in Christ. Any differences between men and women have no bearing on their oneness in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29) or their status as fellow heirs of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7).

In the creation story, Adam was created first, and Eve was made as a companion (Ezer) for him. This creation order is used by Paul to signify a difference of roles for men in both marriage (1 Corinthians 11:3) and the church (1 Timothy 2:12-13). It should be noted that the Bible does not say women must submit to men in general, but wives to husbands (Ephesians 5:22). Indeed, all believers are called to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21). We believe husbands and wives should treat each other with love and respect in a way that mirrors what we see in Christ's love and honoring of his bride (the Church), and in the way the Church submits to Christ by helping to "fill up" what is "lacking in the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1:24). That is, as the bride of Christ, we are called to love people in a way that takes risks so that the world can see (in our willingness to be inconvenienced, lose comfort, or even suffer for them) the very nature of the afflictions of Christ that were offered for them.

Related to the creation order is one of the key elements that qualifies an elder for leadership in the local church. The qualification relates specifically to the person being the husband of one wife or a "one-woman man" (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6). This implies that the ultimate leadership of a church should be male. The Greek words used in these passages reference the specific genders and should not be taken to mean "the spouse of one person." Paul also notes that he does not allow women to exercise teaching authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12). His argument is based on the creation order and therefore this should not be taken to be a culturally limited command (1 Timothy 2:13). At Fellowship Greenville, those who are the overseers and those with teaching authority are our Elders and Pastors.

Holding to the belief that women and men have equal status and value before God, but differing roles in the church, places us in the moderate complementarian category. Both men and women have the same purpose in fulfilling mission of the church: to produce life-long, passionate followers of Jesus. The gifts of the Spirit are not gender-specific, and we welcome women to serve in all other areas of ministry except for the offices of Elder and Pastor. Men whom God calls and equips to serve as Elder or Pastor are to embrace a benevolent responsibility to lead and serve within the church.

God - The Creator of the Family

FATHER

We believe in the Fatherhood of God. The title "Father" implies that God is a relational being. The Bible reveals God has four primary relationships as Father. He is the Father of creation, of the nations, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of all believers. We believe the Bible presents the title "Father" as one of the primary names Christians should use in addressing and relating to God. In doing so, Christians identify themselves as children who belong to the family of God. We are committed to proclaiming and demonstrating this truth about who God is and who we are, so that God will be glorified, and that he might use us to bring others into his family through a personal relationship with his Son. (John 1:12; Exodus 3:14-15; Ephesians 3:16; Matthew 6:9; Romans 8:15; Acts 17:24-28)

SON

We believe God the Son, fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, was God's final sacrifice for the sins of man through the shedding of his blood on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. We believe Jesus is the only way to know God the Father and to experience his plan for marriage and family. We are committed to introducing people to Jesus Christ in order that, by faith, they might personally receive him, be born into the family of God, receive forgiveness and eternal life, and begin a relationship with God that is essential in marriage and family life. (John 1:4,12; 17:3; 1 John

2:23-24; Ephesians 2:19-22; Colossians 1:13-18; Hebrews 1:1-4)

HOLY SPIRIT

We believe God the Holy Spirit is the agent and teacher of a godly marriage and family. We believe when Christian couples and their children consistently yield to his control and power, they will experience harmony in their marriages and families. Therefore, we are committed to sharing the ministry of the Holy Spirit with people so they may know God better, make him known to others, and appropriate his power in fulfilling their duties in marriage and family relationships. (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:5-15; Ephesians 5:18-21)