

God's Good Plan for Gender & Marriage

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[0 : 00] As we turn now to God's word, just to say it again for those of you who maybe knew that one of the commitments of our church and as we've just been singing about the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, the way that we know him is through his word.

And so every week we open up the Bible and we look at it carefully together. To see what it has to say to us today. I'm not gonna preach on building projects.

I'm gonna preach on what comes next in the book of Genesis, which is where we're in. So if you wanna turn with me in your pew Bibles, Genesis 2 is where we'll be. That'll be on page two in your pew Bible.

And as you turn there, will you also pray with me this morning? Lord Jesus, we praise you for your faithfulness and your goodness to us that you have shown to us in Jesus Christ as we have just been singing.

And Lord, now as we turn to your word, we pray that we would see your goodness in your creative acts, Lord, and in the way that you have made us as human beings. Lord, I ask that you would help me this morning.

[1 : 22] Lord, that you would help all of us to understand your word, to know its truth, to receive it as good, to rejoice in your plan for us. Lord, and that as we do this, that we might know you more and what it means to know how to live in a relationship with you.

God, be with us, I pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Sam Smith is a Grammy award-winning singer.

Sam announced this week that they are asking to be called by the pronouns they and them, having also publicly made known that they have embraced a non-binary gender identity.

If you are a follower of the ABC show Bachelors in Paradise, you may know that they also had a groundbreaking event this week as the first same-sex proposal occurred with contestants Demi Burnett proposing to Christian Hagerty.

These were simply a few of the headlines in the news this week as I open up CNN.com, perusing the news outlets to know what's going on in the world.

[2 : 54] And as keen observers have noticed, the fact of these news stories and their proliferation remind us of the rapidity of change in our culture's views on some of the most core aspects of human identity, our gender, our understanding of relationships, of sex, and marriage.

And these questions, of course, have always been there in every society throughout history. But we might fairly say that in the last 30 years, these topics were not discussed and certainly not celebrated as openly as they are today.

These important issues, of course, are not simply out in the media, but it is in our everyday lives as well. These are issues that affect our neighbors, our classmates, our coworkers.

And it's not just out there either. It's in here, isn't it? Some of you in this room have wrestled with questions of gender and identity, of sexual orientation and attraction, of understanding marriage and relationships.

These are important conversations and we need to address them with kind thoughtfulness, with courageous compassion and straightforward clarity.

[4 : 19] And we begin this morning by confessing that the church has not always done this well. And the church is not always doing it well today. And yet it brings us to the question that we have, which is, what does God's word say to us today about human identity, particularly about gender and marriage?

I did not pick this topic because I thought it was time to preach on this. I picked this topic because as we come to Genesis, Genesis 2, verses 18 through 25, these are the very things that this passage addresses.

And so as we continue to that, if you want to turn with me there, we'll look at that. We're going to start in verse 18. And remember where we're at in Genesis. Genesis 1 was this cosmic view from God's perspective of the creation of all things.

And then Genesis 2 was this zoom in on the creation, particularly of humanity and of male and female and what that looks like. And the specifics of God's created order, which in the end he declared to be very good are the things we're going to explore today.

To try to understand why God declares these things profoundly good and reflective of God's goodness in our lives.

[5 : 44] So let's look at Genesis 2. We're going to start in verse 18. And we'll read to the end of the chapter.

Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.

Now out of the ground, the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam, there was not found a helper fit for him.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

[6 : 56] And then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh and she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.

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

What do we learn in this passage about gender and sex and marriage? And is God's plan really good for us? It's a big question.

We're going to try to tackle as much of it as we can this morning. Here's how we're going to do it.

We're going to look at one story. We're going to look at two topics and then we're going to ask three questions and then one final word.

So if you're taking notes, there's your outline. One story, two topics, three questions and a final word. Yep, we can do this. Alright. So, first of all, the story.

[8 : 01] We have to recognize God brings this to us in a narrative. This is not a didactic procedural description but a narrative story. And what we've seen so far in this story is that God is the creator of everything and everything he created in its original form was good.

And the pinnacle, the high point, the end point of his creation was the creation of humanity.

Uniquely among all of his creations made in his image and made to rule over all of the rest of his creation.

To bear his image by reflecting his character and his nature and representing him in the world. And in this whole story we've seen this fundamental givenness, God is the creator and he has made the world the way he has chosen to do so in order to reveal himself and to display his glory.

And this is a good plan that he has made and we as his creations are meant to explore and understand and enjoy his goodness in this creation. So, having said that, this is the background of the story.

We come to Genesis 2, verse 18. And if we're reading carefully, we have come to a very shocking moment in verse 18. The Lord God said, it is not good.

[9 : 21] How could this be? How could anything in this creation be not good? God has said, everything is good and it flows from his goodness and there's been no hint of any not goodness until now and then suddenly there is this problem that presents itself.

It is not good for man and in this case, man is now a gendered being, not just humanity broadly, but the gendered, the male part of the human species.

It is not good for him to be alone. And God states his intention. I will create a helper fit for him. A helper, the word is ezer, is a strong ally, a companion, one who comes alongside, the way that God comes alongside his nation Israel throughout his history to be their strength and to help them to accomplish all that he intends.

God says, I will create a helper and a helper fit. What does that mean by fit? What we see as the story goes on, God is unpacking what fit means.

Fit might be also translated corresponding to of the same type, but we'll see how this, because what happens is that God then brings the animals that he's created to Adam and Adam in his image of Godness gives them names, seeing who they are and in expressing his dominion over creation by doing this.

[11 : 03] but the point of that is not really to talk about that. The point of that is to show that none of them are fit for Adam. None of them, though they have God's image in them or God's glory displayed in a broad way, the way nature displays God's nature, they are not in God's image and they are not fit for male humanity.

They are not a companion for them. And so, God says, now that you have seen this Adam, that none of these are fit, this is where we see in the end of chapter 20, none of them are according to his kind, so there was not a helper fit for him, and he puts the man to sleep, and he takes part of his body out and from that body he then forms of the same essence, creates woman to be with man. Now, we have to, one commentator says this, as we think about how this happens, commenting on this helper being what the relationship is.

Man does not have a governmental priority, but a mutual dependence. Man is created first with a woman to help the man, not vice versa. However, this does not mean an ontological superiority or inferiority.

The word signifies her essential contribution, not inadequacy. What God is creating is not a maid to clean up your dirty socks, or a cook to make sure you have a meal.

[12 : 56] What God is creating is a partner and a companion and a necessary help so that male and female together might carry out God's word.

Notice that Matthew Henry, the old-time commentator, makes a great comment about what part of the body did God pull out. Not made out of the top of his head so that she might be over him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him.

God chose a rib to signify the along-sideness of the creation of woman to be man. And then, as he wakes up, God brings her to him the way a father brings his daughter down the aisle in a wedding ceremony.

And like many grooms, Adam responds with a song, with a poem, finally, I saw the inadequacy of all these other things.

Now, this is the one that I was made for. This is the one that I need. Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, I will give her a name woman. That means that she's with me and we together are going to do what God has called us to do.

[14 : 35] She is my companion, my counterpart. And through her, God will allow us together to fulfill the command to be fruitful and to multiply and have dominion over the earth.

What a good news this is. And then the narrator jumps in in verses 24 and 25. He's been telling the story about Adam and Eve and then you see he steps back and he takes a narrator role for two verses.

He says, therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Do you notice how incongruous this is?

Because Adam and Eve don't have parents. There is no leaving to be done. This is not about Adam and Eve in the garden, the creation of the first man and woman. This is about the pattern that is being established in this text that male and female would live out this calling together.

And it has these beautiful pictures. This marriage is meant to be for a lifetime. They leave all other loyalties to make this their primary loyalty. And they will hold fast to one another in commitment to one another till death do us part as the old vows say it.

[16 : 02] and they become one flesh. And certainly this is a biological union where procreation is happening and where joy and serving and giving pleasure to one another is a part of this incredible good gift that God has given us.

But it's more than just a one flesh biologically. It's a one flesh that creates a new unity. Think about this. God took a rib out of Adam to create another being and now he's calling them to come back together in a kind of union and a kind of unity that is full orb'd, that encompasses all of life.

Where two individuals come together and God creates a new one of a marriage. God is separated so that he might pair them together in a unity.

And it is almost unbelievably beautiful. Verse 25 is one of the most shocking verses in this whole passage. They were naked.

They were not ashamed. And we don't know what that looks like. Because we don't live on the right side of the fall of humanity to know what that could actually be like.

[17:27] But it is a beautiful thing. this story points to God in his fatherly care and his creative majesty making humanity male and female gendered and bringing them together in marriage.

Complimentary companionship for the calling that God has put on them. these then are our two topics aren't they?

The story has brought us to this. So now we have two topics before us. One is gender and one is marriage. How do we think about these things? And I am sure that you are already sitting there with a list of questions.

Here is what I want to encourage you to do. Write them down on your bulletin. Put them in your notes. Hopefully we will get to some of them today. And if we don't by the end of the time I at least will have given you some guideposts on where you can go to think through some of them.

Alright? So topic number one. Gender as God's good gift. What God has done in creating humanity is gendered male and female is described as good.

[18:38] And what I want to do is describe that goodness as best as I can so we can parse that out. First, this gender has an equality to it.

Genesis 1 says he created them. Let's look at it to make sure I get it right. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.

And in this poetic form he says there's this humanity that God is creating and man is a generic term for humanity until the third line where he changes the words to say male and female he created them.

And together then they receive the commission and the calling to live out to have dominion to be fruitful and multiply. They're both in God's image. Both are blessed and both are commissioned. And then in Genesis 2 we see that God is reinforcing their equality. The woman is made out of the same stuff as man. She is not lesser.

[19:41] She is not other. She is not different. She is of the same essence and substance as the man. She is distinct from all the other animals of creation in this way.

And the story highlights this. And we need to start with this equality because we know in human history how easily the distinction of gender has been used as a basis for abuse.

We know how quickly we oppress those who are different from us by making them other. Making ourselves bigger by making others smaller.

And gender is one of the ways that we have done this. That is not what God has created in this story. That is not what God has done. And there is no room for hatred.

There is no room for dismissing women as lesser in value in society. And we must acknowledge that even the church at times, maybe more so than not, has struggled to do this well and to honor men and women equally as co-heirs and as co-laborers in the gospel.

[21:02] It is in the Bible. And yet we have failed to live it out often in our culture and in our church broadly. So we need to recognize that this equality is an essential starting point for understanding gender because then the next move is to see that there is distinction.

There is a male and female. And this is a part of a pattern that you see more broadly in God's creative act. When he created the world back in Genesis 1, he created light and dark that go together.

He created day and night that are complementary, distinct things that are paired together. He created sky and sea. He created land, dry land and water.

And all of these things are God separating and creating distinction so that there might be a unified whole that is the beauty of God's creation.

And this is exactly what God is doing with male and female. He's saying humanity is not an androgynous, genderless being, but humanity is this beautiful pairing of two distinct genders.

[22:20] Not interchangeable, but distinct from one another. And we see this in the way. We see that man was created first and that the woman was created to be his alongside companion, his helper.

We see that man was given the command to leave his parents and to cleave to his wife uniquely. So we see throughout this story that God is making these distinctions.

And of course, it's not that hard to stop and to say, as we look around, men and women actually look different. Our gender is a biological reality.

The Olympics recognize this. When there's a hundred meter dash, there's a men's event and a women's event. That reflects some of the biological distinction.

Now, we need to be extremely careful how we think through and apply those things. But that is a part of the givenness of how God has created humanity, male and female, with distinct gender.

[23 : 30] So just a brief pause to apply this. We must recognize that in our culture, and this is not the first time it's happened in human history, but in our culture today, there are impulses to erase gender from our sense of human identity.

There are ways in which gender distinctions are being minimized. And some of it comes from a good heart to overcome the discrimination and the oppression that has happened.

And some of it comes from a desire to really have equality be established. And yet, we must recognize this is not God's plan. Another headline this week I saw was an article about raising babies.

Maybe you're familiar with this. Some are seeking to raise their children as genderless children. out of fear of imposing upon them some gendered stereotype or expectations that would feel oppressive to them.

This is just one example, perhaps, of how our culture is thinking about these things. And we need to see that that is a departure from God's creative purpose.

[24 : 52] From God's creative order. So we have equality and we have distinction, but we finally have the complementary nature. That, in fact, the two of them are meant to fit together.

Right? They're meant to go together. There is an inseparableness as well as a distinctiveness about male and female. Clearly, this happens in biology.

We don't have men and women. We don't have children. We cannot be fruitful and multiply if we don't have men and women.

And even in a modern science, when we can do some of that finagling and test tubes and outside of human bodies, we still need men and women. We still need to create the appropriate products so that we can actually have procreation.

But, of course, it is much more than that. The complementary nature is much more than that.

Because this doing it together, this companionship, this partnership that God has created has an interdependence.

[26 : 09] And now here's the challenge. What does that actually look like? Does it look like boys like trucks and girls like dolls?

Or boys like blue and girls like pink? Friends, I'll just tell you, they're not biblical categories. They may be true of your children. They may not.

They may be true of you. They may not. They are not biblical categories. If you look back and you think about it, think about how even the expectations of what gendered expression looks like, how it's changed.

300 years ago in England, men wore wigs and hosiery. I mean, just to say it, like it's different, right? The cultural expression of manhood and womanhood has been a moving target throughout all of human history.

You may be guessing, I'm hedging on this. I'm not going to give you lists of what masculinity and femininity look like. You know, what I do want to tell you a story about this.

[27 : 18] And that was that I came to faith in Christ right before my senior year in high school. And I went off to college having never thought about any of these things or what the Bible has to say.

And I was involved in a great church and a great campus ministry that really made me think through what is the Bible saying? How do I live under it? And I was confronted by a view of gender that I had never really examined or thought about before.

But you know, in the context of that, I had three married couples. Actually, one guy was single most of the time and then he got married near the end. There were three couples though that I saw that all embraced this distinction, equality, and complementarity in gender.

And yet each one of those couples had different personalities. They had different dynamics in the way that they lived out the distinctions, in the way that they led and served and helped one another

to be the people that God wanted them to be and to do the things that God had called them to do. And the sum was greater than their parts in each case. But if you talk to those three women, there might be some broad characteristics that they would say, these are things that we feel are important.

[28 : 41] But man, they are so different that for me to stand here and try to give you a short list of, well, women are like this and men are like this and this is the way it should be, I can promise you that at least 20% of you would say that doesn't fit.

Because the breadth of the creative work that God has done in creating each one of us is broad enough. And what I want to do is, rather than give you that list, I want to invite you to a conversation.

A conversation with one another about what does that look like in your life? I want to call you to a pursuit. If you are a woman, to ask yourself, how am I thankful that God has created me, a woman? And in what way is that unique? If I am a man, how do I thank God that he has made me a man? And in what ways does that call me uniquely to follow him?

And in our marriages and in our relationships outside of marriage, to think how do we honor one another in the distinctiveness of our gender as brothers and sisters in Christ?

[29 : 59] Much more could be said, but the clock is ticking. I'm only on my second topic. I've got three questions to go and it's 11.15. So, let's keep moving. I will say this.

There is already a great Sunday school on our website and there will be another Sunday school coming up later this fall that will address some of these issues more so. Second topic, marriage. I want to highlight four things that God says about marriage in this passage. As we see that when God created gendered beings, he then brought them together into this union.

Okay? This was the very central piece. Gender and marriage were tied explicitly together and this leads to the first point that I want to say. As one commentator said it, it is notable that there is only one Eve.

There are not multiple Eves, nor is there another male, but there is monogamy and heterosexuality built into the created order of marriage.

[31 : 11] This is the way God has made it to be. That the woman is a counterpart to man and together in their gender distinctiveness, their marriage is meant to display all that God has for them in marriage.

This is the pattern. I know this is controversial. I know I just threw a grenade into the room. Stay with me. We're going to add, the questions are going to address some of the things that just jumped up in your mind about what about, so hold on.

But that's the first thing I want to say. Second thing is that it is a committed relationship. God's intention is that a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and come together in this committed union that is intended to be unbreakable apart from death.

This is why the scripture says that God hates divorce. And I know that this is a very fallen world and there are lots of things for us to be said about how that plays out in the fallen world, but we want to see that God's created purpose in this was a committed lifelong relationship and that this is good, that it would have a priority over all other relationships, familial or otherwise.

Recognize how countercultural that would have been in the ancient Near East where your wife would be more important than your parents or your tribe or your clan. And it is a pattern that is universal in creation.

[32 : 50] It's for all people. So, we have the gendered heterosexuality, we have commitment, third, we have union.

for one flesh, for sex and companionship. And we need to recognize that God gave us this incredibly powerful gift of the act of human intercourse as a gift to be done within the safe confines of that committed relationship with one another.

this is a good gift that God has given us, but it is not for all places and not all contexts. It is given as a part of this picture that the man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

This is the context in which we are meant in God's created purpose for us to live out this desire that so dominates our culture and our world today.

More on that later. Let me be just as explicit. Therefore, outside of a heterosexual marriage, it is not good for us to be sexually active, whether that's outside of the commitment of marriage, outside of

the heterosexuality of marriage, outside of the union of marriage.

[34 : 17] It is not good. Then the fourth thing that I want you to see is that in this context, in its created goodness, it was a beautiful thing.

Adam rejoiced. His heart leapt out of his chest when he saw the one that he was made for and who was made for him. Not to rule over, but because finally, this one that was like him was brought to him.

And it was beautiful. And they were naked and they were unashamed. What a beautiful picture that is of a relationship and how our hearts long for that kind of acceptance and transparency and intimacy.

So this is God's ordained social unit. It is the fundamental unit of human society and creation and the means of carrying out the commands.

So how do we apply this? Well, first of all, in our world today, we need to clarify what marriage means and then we need to celebrate what God does mean by marriage.

[35 : 38] We need to see that heterosexual, monogamous, faithful, lifelong marriage is a good thing. We are meant to cultivate it and invest in it.

And if you are single, it's okay for you to long for it. It's also okay if you don't long for it right now. We'll get to that. That's one of my questions. We'll get there.

But to value it, to support it in your friends who are married, to know about it so that you can do so. We ought to rejoice that God created marriage in its goodness and in its original form.

Two really brief advertisements. In your bulletin, there is an announcement. On November 2nd, we are having a marriage seminar here at this church. Alistair Groves, who works for CCEF, is coming to speak on marriage.

There's a whole description in your flyer. Think about, for those of you who are married or maybe are close to being married or even want to just support those who are married, consider coming, setting aside that Saturday to come and be a part of it.

[36 : 46] There's also an announcement on a separate page about Family Life. Family Life is a national ministry that runs this thing called Weekend to Remember and they're running some great discounts. If you are interested in going to this as a married couple just to do some tune-up work on your relationship, to get away and to focus for a little while on the Lord and on one another, these are some great opportunities for you to invest in it.

Okay. Having considered then our two topics of gender and marriage and having stepped on a number of landmines along the way, there are a lot of questions, aren't there?

And fundamentally, the questions arise because what we've been talking about up to this point is God's original good creation before the fall of humanity.

And what that means is that we have never experienced it the way God intended it in its fullness because the fall of humanity, our rebellion against God as a human race, our therefore alienation from him, and our sin impulse to go away from his plan has created all sorts of problems whereby this created goodness feels like a zephyr that we can barely grasp onto maybe at moments.

We live in a fallen world where this original goodness has not been our experience for many of us. So what about questions?

[38 : 21] What about gender dysphoria? What about same-sex attraction? And what about singleness? There are more. Sorry, they didn't make the list.

We won't be here. If I wanted to keep going, we'll be here till one and we don't want to do that. So, but these are the three things. And again, I want to reemphasize, these are questions that are not about them, out there, those people who struggle with this.

But this is something that is a we question, that we as human beings will struggle with. And there will be people sitting next to you in the pew who may be struggling with these questions. So, first of all, what about gender dysphoria?

For those of you who are unfamiliar with this term, it can be defined as this, a marked incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and their assigned gender, that is their gender of a child at birth that's determined by their biological parts, their assigned gender of at least six months duration.

That's the official definition of gender dysphoria. Someone who feels like the body that they have doesn't match the gender that they feel.

[39 : 37] That might be the more, the simpler way to say it. That there's a dissonance or a disconnect between those things. How do we think about this?

Again, there's much to be said. I'm going to give you a really brief framework. Here's the thing. The way we want to view these questions is through the framework of the biblical storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and glory.

So we've talked about the created goodness of gender. Now we're talking about someone who's experiencing a fallen disconnect or dissonance where the gender of their body, their biological sex, doesn't match their psyche and their soul and their self-perception.

What do we do with that? Sam Smith said in his post that he was tired of being at war with his gender. Isn't that an interesting phrase to describe his experience?

And we must understand that this is real because the fall affects us holistically. It affects every part of us. For some, this will be a biologically sourced reality that something in their brain chemistry, something in their hormones, something is where it just doesn't fit.

[41 : 01] For some, it may be caused by trauma, by broken relationships, by cultural stereotypes that have felt oppressive to them, where this fit of their internal being and their biological body just does not work.

And it is a deep and difficult challenge. And we need to start by being compassionate to them. Think about what it would be like if when people look at you, they see something and you feel like that's not me.

What they see is not who they feel like they are. How terrible is that? How difficult is that? How heartbreaking is that?

So we need to recognize that this is a reality for some. So how do we respond? How do we walk through this? First of all, we need to go back to the question of God's givenness.

What has God made us to be? And then we also need to say, how is it that the fall has warped or shaped or affected my experience of what might have been a good thing?

[42 : 13] Because we all experience a little bit of both of that, right? There's still vestiges of our created goodness and then there's also these places where it's warped and twisted or where it's no longer what it's supposed to be and this dissonance that we feel, we think this should not be and that's right.

It should not be. This is not the way it was meant to be. So the church needs to start first with compassion to seek to understand rather than to fix people.

Secondly, we need to start, we need to affirm the reality of their experience but then to help bring to them a biblical framework of thinking through how to interpret their experience through this creation fall redemption pattern so that they might think about what it is actually that they're experiencing.

And third, we need to recognize that we need to love them as fellow broken human beings who most of all need the gospel, who need Jesus Christ, who need to find an identity deeper than their gender, deeper than their bodies, deeper than their things in being in Christ because this is what they were made to be.

And that then as that is established, then they can begin to think through how then they respond to this experience that they have.

[43 : 46] Friends, there is a desire and a plan on God's part that this dissonance of gender dysphoria will be restored. But it may not be in this life.

Some of us will walk through this and carry this dissonance for the rest of their lives. But we do know that one day God will restore it.

We do know that one day in heaven we will know the gendered being that we were created to be apart from the fall. And in heaven that dissonance will be gone.

And just as there's no more tears, no more sorrow, no more death, so there will be no more of this dissonance and we will know who we are and we will be fully known by God and loved and celebrated.

There's lots more to say about this. There's a great book. It's a starting place for you by Vaughn Roberts called Transgender. I recommend it.

[44 : 52] It was on the bookstore earlier this week but it's sold out right now. So we'll get more. So, alright. I'm already over time. I gotta keep going.

Second, what about same-sex attraction and marriage? again, think through this framework of creation, fall, redemption, right? If we were in Adam's shoes, we would not experience same-sex

attraction.

God created a goodness of gender and distinction and attraction that was the original pattern. and yet, in our fallen world, we recognize that this is true for some people, for some of us.

We find that our romantic and sexual desire does not gravitate towards those of the opposite gender but of the same gender. And some of this may be biological and some of it may be environmental and some of it may be willful.

But we need to recognize that this is a reality for many people. And the challenge of talking about this in our culture today is that our culture has so elevated sex in our culture and made it our primary identity and a fundamental human right.

[46 : 15] Therefore, we ought to be able to have sex with people whenever we want to and who we choose to apart from any constraint or any pattern of God's plan because that has been a broader cultural value than when we talk about this question to talk about any sort of limitation or any constraint on how we live this out feels like it's oppression.

We need to recognize that this is not how God intended it in the beginning. And to submit to his givenness means that there may be some of us people who will never experience sexual union with another human being in this life because they want to live within the constraints of what God has called them to.

And it might be because of their same-sex attraction and their understanding that this is not God's plan for marriage that they will live a life of faithful celibacy until eternity.

Or it may be that they will and it may be too that some of you may be single and have heterosexual desires and still live in this calling of being faithful and abstinent for your whole life.

There is no plan for same-sex marriage in God's kingdom and purposes. God's plan is for sexual abstinence outside of marriage regardless of gender.

[48 : 03] Now, let me one minute on this. There can be a whole other conversation about how we engage with our society or our government in how we think about these things.

That is a separate conversation because I think there's and I think that there's an appropriate diversity of views even within the church on how to navigate that question. What I have been presenting to you is this is what God's word says for God's people and then we want to think about how does that apply to the broader culture and we need to do so with a lot more compassion and a lot less virulence than we have tended to do so.

So what about our friends who struggle with these things? Well, if they don't know Christ then we love them as fallen and broken people who are lost and need Jesus.

We don't need to fix their sexual orientation. we don't need to fix their relationships first.

We need to help them see that the life and death and resurrection of Jesus is their greatest hope.

What about those who do know Christ who struggle with these things?

[49 : 22] Well, you know what we need to do with them? We need to love them as sinners who experience life as fallen and broken in the world and who need to be pointed to their greatest hope which is the forgiveness of sins and the new life that they have in Christ that they might grow in God's grace to live out the life that God has called them of faithfulness to his plan to engage in his redemptive purposes in their lives to be transformed more and more into the likeness of God.

All right. Washed and Waiting by Wesley Hill is a book downstairs. Be a great book for you to consider in light of this.

The third one and this flows from what I just said what about singleness? Marriage is a central motif in the biblical story and in the creation story and we need to recognize that singleness is a little bit different from these other things because singleness is not a result of the fall.

Right? Singleness is a reality in human existence but it is not per se a result of the fall in the same way that gender confusion or same-sex attraction is.

What we need to do is to say briefly these things. One, marriage is a dominant paradigm that ought to be celebrated as essential to the human race and to our calling to live it out.

[50 : 56] However, it is not the purpose for all of God's people. It is not essential and it is not a second-hand state. Goodness gracious, all we need to do is to look at Jesus Christ, the God-man who lived a single life and was not sexually active and was fully displaying the glory of God in all that he did.

Not only do we see that, but we see that he commends those who choose singleness, who become eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God, who choose singleness for their lifetime.

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 seems to say singleness has a preference because of the single-mindedness where you can serve your life. I was single until I was 37.

I know the joy of that focus. I have also experienced the joy of living in a family where now I have a wife and children to take care of and the joy of taking care of them and there is not a value laid on one of these or the other as greater.

They are both good. And in Luke 20 as the Pharisees sought to trap Jesus in a question about levirate marriage and how they might, what happens in eternity, Jesus says this, in heaven there will be neither marriage nor the giving in marriage.

[52 : 18] you see in God's kingdom in the end of days the kingdom of God is a community of his children and marriage is a good that we are to celebrate but we are meant to be a community that is robust enough for us to find companionship and fellowship and partnership in the gospel call that he has placed on us as his people as his church and therefore we should be finding friendship and we should be finding the church to be a family and we should be finding our identity in Christ to allow us to joyfully and patiently and with perseverance live out God's calling for us to be his ambassadors to be his children to be his servants in the world together.

together. This is a goodness that we ought to celebrate and recognize. We don't need to pit singleness and marriage against one another and sometimes a church feels like it only talks about marriage and we live in a world where sometimes we talk about how terrible marriage is in.

We need to bring these things into alignment to what God says which is they are both good and they both have their place. But this brings me then to my final word and I promise we're almost done here.

Why did God create us as gendered beings with marriage as a central identity? He did so because in these very things we display God in the world. In gender we see distinction and equality and complementarity which points to God himself.

God who in his Godhead is one God in three persons of the same essence but differentiated in person and role. And so the son proceeds from the father and the spirit from the father and the son and there is this ordering and yet this complementarity and this unity and part of the reason why God has created gender is so that we might in some way picture the very nature of our triune God.

[54 : 29] And if that's the picture of gender then marriage then throughout the Bible becomes this metaphor this picture of God's relationship with his people.

And we see this in Isaiah and we see it in Hosea and we see it most fully in Ephesians chapter 5 where it's laid out that this is about Christ and the church that our marriages picture the relationship between Christ and the church and finally in Revelation 19 we see that all of this is going towards a time where we as God's people will be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb and we will rejoice and be glad because God has set his love on us like a bridegroom sets his love on his bride to welcome him and to celebrate him and to join with him in an intimacy we can't even imagine and a companionship that will be beyond our greatest hopes and desires.

This is what God has created when he created gender and marriage and that's why it's important and that's why it's worth us thinking carefully about what it is.

The beauty of the gospel pictured in gender and marriage a deeper union a greater intimacy a fuller joy and a completeness as we are joined with Jesus we will be fully and finally all that God will have us to be.

Let's pray. Lord we are thankful to you for your word and we ask that you would Lord help us to continue to wrestle with these things Lord to submit to your word and to seek to understand it more fully.

[56 : 09] Lord I pray for those who wrestle and struggle Lord with the way that the fall has affected us. Lord I pray that we might take these things to the cross and take them to one another that we might support and encourage one another in it.

God make us a church that displays your glory in these ways we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.