

Sermon Notes/follow-up

7/26/15

“Love Wins After All: Rescuing the Sexual Revolution’s Refugees” (John 4:1-42)

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John 4 is one of my favorite gospel texts because it is so full of the abounding grace of God. These notes will fill in some gaps in the sermon, expand on some points made in the sermon, and further the sermon’s applications.

One cannot help but make comparisons between the woman at the well and Nicodemus in the previous chapter:

Man vs. woman

Jew vs. Gentile

Teacher vs. slut

Knowledgeable vs. ignorant

But interestingly, he comes at night while she meets Jesus at midday. Nicodemus ends up in the darkness because he loves the world (= old creation; Jn. 3:19-21). The woman, a despised Samaritan, comes into the light because she acknowledges her sin and trusts the living water of Jesus to cleanse and renew her. The immoral woman of Samaria enters the kingdom ahead of Israel’s finest teachers! The grace of Jesus is nothing if not surprising. Truly, he came for the sick, not the healthy!

Note that no two conversations Jesus has in the gospel accounts were exactly the same. Each time he presented the gospel, he customized it to his audience. We should do the same. The message does not change – but the message is so rich and so versatile, we can accentuate different aspects of it in different in different situations. Most of those “how to share your faith without losing your friends” programs include a “canned,” “one size fits all” presentation of the gospel. Jesus shows us a better way. Love people and speak truth into their lives. Meet people where they are, but don’t leave them there.

We must seek to strike a Jesus-like balance in combining conviction and compassion. We cannot come off as outraged Pharisees. We must be loving, truthspeaking missionaries. We must follow the model of Jesus. He perfectly balanced conviction with compassion. He did not approve of the woman’s sin but neither did he come off as harsh. He sought to expose her sin, but only so she would see that he was offering living water found nowhere else. This is the goal of all evangelism: to show thirsty people the way to the living water only Jesus can provide.

While we have to rebuke the licentiousness of the culture around us, we should do so in love, from the posture of a caring friend (Prov. 27:5-6). We are to speak the truth in love, with boldness and kindness.

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The sexual revolution is a house of cards that will eventually come crashing down. The sexual revolution looks triumphant right now but it cannot last. It presses unnatural, unbiblical forms of life on us which are simply not sustainable. J. D. Unwin's historic studies on human sexuality and civilization concluded, "Any human society is free to choose either to display great energy or to enjoy sexual freedom; the evidence is that it cannot do both for more than one generation." In other words, energy spent on sexual escapades eventually emasculates and drains a culture of its vitality, so it loses productivity and finally collapses. Sexual discipline, on the other hand, unleashes incredible energy in a culture for other pursuits, leading to wide-scale cultural flourishing, innovation, etc.

[Brian Mattson has pointed out that when we defend the biblical model of the family, we are not defending a parochial, sectarian version of human life, but one that promotes universal human flourishing:](#)

what the family *is* is not "our" thing. It is not some kind of Christian distinctive. Christians *account for it* in a very specific way—as the way God designed it as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. It is what we call a "creation ordinance," meaning that marriage is for *everybody*, Christian or not. But even absent that theological account (and I see no good reason to leave it out), it remains what it is. Every single child born in human history (Jesus excepted) had precisely one father and one mother. This is the first human society, father+mother=children, not merely in *time*, but *priority*. It is the first society a newborn baby discovers; it remains the strongest and most foundational bond until such time as one forms another by joining with a member of the opposite sex and creating new life. It is the most visible, the most basic, and the most important of all natural human institutions. It is an anthropological and biological reality such that it is *pre-political*. No one had to invent this society. Certainly preachers and prudes didn't invent it. Throughout all of recorded human history, all over the world, civilizations have noticed its reality, and sought to recognize and protect it as the best arrangement for social peace, prosperity, and general welfare. You know why? Because it *is* the best arrangement for social peace, prosperity, and general welfare. They noticed, among lots of things, its domesticating effects on otherwise promiscuous men, the protection it afforded otherwise vulnerable women, its stability and provision for children, its economic power, and its success as a vehicle for transmitting beliefs and values across generations.

That is the institution we are talking about. Forgive me for being irritated at those who suggest that advocating for the institution of the family is some kind of parochial defense of peculiarly Christian ideals that we have no right "imposing" on others. It is, rather, a defense of a reality that persists and survives our every attempt to circumvent it, from deadbeat dads to no-fault divorce to cohabitation. It survives because God made it, and because of a simple fact that neither you nor I, nor any homosexual or lesbian couple can escape:

Boy+girl=children.

We've now institutionalized a version of the family where wombs must be rented and vials of sperm must be purchased. And in every case of its kind the kids will be missing one of their real parents. No one has a clue about the consequences of subjecting wombs to market valuations or embryos as economic commodities, but I guess this is one of those Pelosian things you've got to pass so you can find out what's in it.

This much should be crystal clear: "Our" version is not the novelty. We are not the ones foisting some newfangled specialized orthodoxy on the unwilling public.

In other words, Jesus' vision for marital and family life is worth defending. When Jesus confronts the woman in John 4 about her sexual and marital history, he is obviously presupposing the same creation norms he applies elsewhere (e.g., Mark 10:1-12). By calling her to repentance he is calling her into a life of true flourishing. She has been seeking to drink out of dry wells and broken cisterns. Jesus' offer of living water certainly includes a call to repent from false forms of family life and to embrace God's creational design for marriage and sex.

Mattson points out that a weakened family is the road to statism; strong nuclear families are essential to holding the state in check. The loss of fathers means we get the "paternalistic state." The loss of mothers means we get the "nanny state." With our country's illegitimacy rate hitting 40% (we truly are a "nation of bastards," as Farrow puts it), does anyone doubt the need to return to the ancient wisdom of the Scriptures? With the loss of the family, our freedoms will be lost as well. Speaking of and to libertarians, he writes,

They say they *hate* Statism and out of control government. But is it an accident that they refer to the civil government as "Paternalistic" and the "Nanny" state? Paternalism is what you get in a society without fathers. Nannies are what you get in a society without mothers. You'd think this might clue them in to a rather important principle: *nuclear families are one of the chief means of limiting the state*. They are the foundation of civil society, a buffer zone between the individual and raw power of the state. I have little sympathy when you're blasé about whether children should have both a father and a mother and then complain when the state inevitably becomes one or the other. It's almost like *asking* for it.

So the institutional family's fair-weather political friends will—foolishly—abandon the very field they ought to care most about. It is unfortunate, because we could really use their support and they could really use our convictions.

[Peter Leithart has demonstrated that our appeals on behalf of biblical sexuality have a distinct advantage: all men intuitively know that we are right \(though he also shows there is no non-theological, religiously neutral way to demonstrate that claim\):](#)

In what sense, then can we describe same-sex relations, as Paul does in Romans 1, as “unnatural”?...

The claim that homosexuality is ‘unnatural’ has weight only if ‘nature’ is tied to a notion of *proper* ends and goods. The claim would then be that same-sex relations violate the purposes and aims of human sexuality. But discovering those aims and purposes apparently requires more than a study of nature.... One of Paul’s claims in Romans 1 is that all human beings know God (v. 21) through creation (v. 20). This knowledge of God includes knowledge of what Paul calls the “ordinance of God” (v. 32), specifically, the ordinance that those who practice the evils Paul lists in verses 28-31 “are worthy of death” (v. 32). That seems to include standards of sexual behavior. Through the creation, human beings know the ordinance of God that there is a “natural function” for sexuality. And in knowing God they also know that it is “unnatural” for men to commit indecent acts with men (vv. 26-27). That is, creation itself reveals, to some degree, the proper ends and goals of sexuality.

One of Paul’s other main claims is that human beings suppress what they know from the creation, so that they become futile, with dark hearts, foolish idolaters (vv. 21-23). Even though they know the ordinance of God, and know that they practice things that deserve death, “they also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (v. 32).

Again, though Paul doesn’t directly apply this to sexuality, we can infer as much. Though creation shows that same-sex relations are unnatural, some resist this knowledge so much that they give hearty approval to same-sex relations. That seems like a fair description of today’s landscape.

However we tease it out, Paul is saying that in their fallen condition human beings both *know* and do *not* know God’s requirements regarding sex. And he is also saying that in some historical moments the *not* knowing becomes dominant, though it never entirely suppresses the knowing. (Of course, we know about this dynamic of knowing and not-knowing from Paul, that is, from revelation. Creation was never intended to be the sole source for moral knowledge. Even *unfallen* Adam needed the Word of God.)

In cultures of darkness, the explicit commands of revelation appear *unnatural*, and the judgment that same-sex relations to be “unnatural” can no longer rest on a consensus about what is natural. Today, many appeal to nature -that is, the behavior of animals and the common behavior of human beings - to *support* same-sex relations. Francesca Murphy has recently written that marriage has now become a matter of faith. We can say the same about sexuality in general.

Neill’s book shows that this has been a fairly common condition in human society. As Paul leads us to expect, we can find plenty of examples of cultures that are “futile in speculation” and whose “foolish hearts have become dark.” We are living in one right now. MH Abrams once said that we live in a biblical culture where what we are habituated to take biblical concepts as universal truths. That was true when Abrams wrote it, but that biblical culture is fading.

*Practically* speaking, I suspect that appeals to creation are not going to be very effective. Many today don't believe that ends are evident in the natural world at all; many believe that we have the right to assert our will over nature in defiance of whatever contours nature itself might have. The cleverest advocates of same-sex marriage notice that appeals to nature rest on concealed theological claims. Of course, *practically* speaking, appeals to revelation aren't likely to be effective either.

Paul's description of the complex state of moral knowledge does, however, give hope that our appeals for sexual purity aren't in vain. If we say, "Look here, men and women are physically designed for one another," we are appealing to something that everyone knows, however suppressed that knowledge is. If we say, "Sex is about more than pleasure - sex leads to reproduction," we are not speaking in a void. Even God's *revealed* demands for sexual purity don't come out of the blue, but come to people who live in God's world and who "know the ordinance of God," again no matter how suppressed that knowledge may be.

Paul implies that, even in an age of massive sexual confusion, our appeals to both creation and revelation may still catch the conscience.

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Part of *Obergefell's* collateral damage is the way it denigrates singles. Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote:

No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right...

[Sidenote: Kennedy is very fuzzy on where our rights come from, which is *the* critical issue in the whole debate. He does not appeal to self-evident, transcendent truths, the way America's founders did. They clearly grounded our rights in the God of the Bible, his Word, and his work of creation. There is no other place to go outside of Genesis 1-2 to find a basis for the kinds of rights Americans have always held dear. Rights are a corollary of *imago Dei*. Kennedy's fuzziness here is very troubling. What exactly does it mean for marriage to be a "right"? Rights bring with them corresponding demands - demands we can place on others. In the nature of the case, we can demand whatever we have a right to. Does the right to marry mean single people can demand the government must provide them with spouses? And if we have a right to marry, do we have right to a happy marriage? Can the

government provide that? Or does it mean that person A wants to marry person B, person A has a right to marriage with person B, even if person B does not want marriage? Kennedy has failed to explain and prove the key assertion in his opinion, namely, the way in which marriage functions as a right.]

[Sidenote #2: Given Kennedy's fuzziness about where this right to marry comes from, what is to bar the door to polygamy, incest, pederasty, etc.? This is not a slippery slope argument (though there is a slippery slope here); it is simply a way of getting at the reasoning Kennedy uses to arrive at his conclusion. What's so magical about the number two? If gender doesn't matter to marriage, why should number? Further, why should marriage be considered a permanent, lifelong bond? If gender doesn't matter, why should duration? While we're busy redefining marriage, stripping it of its God-given features, who gets to decide where the lines are drawn? The lines look very arbitrary. Perhaps society has had reasons to rule out brother/sister incest, given the kind of offspring they'd produce. But what kind of objection can be raised to two sisters who want to marry? What if 4 people want to form a group marriage for the next 5 years? Who's to say they can't or shouldn't? Where does Kennedy's new definition come from? And if new freedoms are continually being discovered by our ever more enlightened rulers, who's to say where it will all end? If marriage evolves, there cannot be an end!]

Further, Kennedy's opinion includes this line: "Marriage responds to the universal fear that a lonely person might call out only to find no one there." As has been pointed out many, Kennedy has virtually idolized marriage, and in doing so, has shamed singles, condemning them to lives of loneliness. In the name of protecting the dignity of gays, he has stripped dignity from singles.

Biblically, a celibate life is a fully valid, fully dignified alternative to married life (Matt. 19, 1 Cor. 7). Most people will and should get married, but singleness is not a "consolation gift" for losers, as Kennedy makes it sound. And further, marriage is not a cure-all. Marriage as an institution was never about expanding freedom (as Kennedy suggests), but rather giving up freedoms (e.g., "forsaking all others"). (The apostle Paul seemed to believe singles actually had more freedom, especially in times of upheaval.) In addition, there are plenty of married people who are lonely. We must counter-Kennedy's marital idealism with a marital realism that prepares couples for the often harsh realities of married life. "For better or for worse..." Getting married is not the chief end of life, nor is it the ultimate source of human happiness (even in the case of a good marriage). While Kennedy says that the same sex couples whose desire to be married prompted the Supreme Court case truly respect marriage, the truth is, they do not. They do not respect what marriage is. Perhaps they want certain legal benefits that attend to the married estate, but anyone who thinks marriage can be reduced to matters of inheritance and hospital visitation rights does not really understand it. While Kennedy likes to talk about marriage having some kind of transcendent purpose, larger than the couple, but he never gets around to telling what that higher purpose is – and given his

presuppositions about reality, it is impossible for him to do so. His rhetoric is so much poetic hot air. It sounds nice, but it is vacuous.

What does the church offer to the celibate single? Is there hope for singles to find companionship and dignity and love outside of marriage? Obviously, the church offers the same gospel to people, whether married or single, young or old, black or white, etc. In one sense, marital status has very little bearing on the ministry of the church to people as people. Singles and married both need the same thing from the church: Christ Jesus, offered in Word and sacraments. What we have in common in Christ vastly outweighs what we might not share, in terms of life circumstances. Interestingly, when Scripture does speak to various demographic categories in the church (e.g., younger and older women in Titus 2), it is for the sake of bringing them together rather than keeping them apart.

Scripture gives to singles a radically revolutionary dignity. Single Christians live an eschatological lifestyle, pointing people to the ultimate marriage of Christ and his church. Thus, believers who remain celibate don't miss out on the greatest love story of all; they are full participants in the gospel narrative.

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One of the claims of the LGBT movement has been that since they were "born that way," they cannot be morally judged for their sexual practices. The story in John 4 is a reminder that they are half right. We are all "born that way" – meaning, we are all born with strong tendencies and proclivities to sin. We are naturally bent to seek water in any well other than that of the living God. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. Apart from Christ, all of us are born slaves to sin. We are born into bondage. The bondage may take different forms in our lives, but it is a universal fact, outside of grace.

We need not concern ourselves with genetics. There may or may not be a genetic predisposition to homosexuality (or adultery, or bestiality, etc.), but there is certainly an innate tendency for everyone to become a sexual sinner as soon as they hit puberty. Our only hope is the intervening grace of God. We all come into the world hell bent on self-destruction unless God rescues us.

But knowing that such rescue is a real possibility is incredibly important for those struggling with sexual sins. Sexual sins are hard to deal with because they touch the very core of our being and tend to become sins of identity (e.g., we find it hard to separate ourselves from the sin). But in 1 Corinthians 6, after listing various categories of notoriously stubborn sins, Paul says, "such *were* some of you!" The grace of God is real and powerful.

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It is easy for us to look at the woman at the well and feel a sense of moral superiority. Especially for those who were raised in a faithful church context, married as virgins, and remain happily married-with-kids to this day, it might seem like this woman belongs to a different class of persons. Let's grant the point, to some degree, but we must also qualify it. The truth is that compared to Jesus, we belong in the same category as the woman. And further, Jesus actually is morally superior to the woman (infinitely so!), yet he speaks to her tenderly and compassionately. How much more should we do so to similar sinners, given our moral proximity to them relative to Jesus?

The truth is that it is no more difficult for God to save a homosexual or an adulterer than it was for him to save you or me. Given that the sexual revolution has and will continue to cause untold heartache and grief, what are to do as the church? Certainly, we have to teach and disciple our own members to stand firm in biblical sexual ethics, despite pressures and temptations. But we also have to provide a safehouse for the refugees of the sexual revolution. Perhaps Russell Moore has said it best: "I think the sexual revolution is going to leave a lot of people wanting. It is not going to carry through on its promises and so we need to be ready for those – like the woman at the well in Samaria – to be able to speak about, not only what it is that they are doing wrong with a call to repentance, but also to say, 'We have living water that you know not of. We have living water that actually satisfies.'"

When the sexual revolution finally collapses in on itself, faithful churches have to be there to pick up the pieces and put lives and cultures back together. Our culture has nearly finished deconstructing marriage; it will be up to us to reconstruct marriage, to rebuild family cultures of love and truth. Our churches need to be places where refugees from the sexual revolution can come and find healing and hope. We need to be able to teach them, declare forgiveness to them, and help point them to the way forward.

Our culture teaches the meaning of life is found in the orgasm. Everything is sacrificed to and for the sake of sexual satisfaction. Any sexual rules are considered oppressive and confining – and we must never ever cramp anyone's style! But it is becoming increasingly evident that sex, as wonderful as it is, cannot *ultimately* satisfy. We were made for more. Sex was made to point us to an even greater union, a greater love – Christ and his church. Our world is parched. Let us offer the living water of the gospel – and with it, God's beautiful plan for human sexuality, which is a reflection and echo of the gospel. Our world is enslaved. Let us cut their bonds and fetters by pointing them to the Savior.

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There are 3 categories of people I sought to address in the sermon, as illustrations of how John 4 can help us navigate the realities of the sexual revolution and take in its refugees.



1. There are those who are church-going Christians, who have been taught the gospel and a biblical sex ethic. The problem is, they have not lived up to what they know. Perhaps they got involved in porn. Or went “too far” with their girlfriend. Those in this category will not be helped by relaxing the standards; they know better. Grace is not the same as tolerance. What they need is genuine encouragement and accountability as they fight against these sins. In a church like ours, it is easy for someone who struggles with sexual sins (which are often of a private nature, hidden from view – unless someone gets pregnant!) to think “I am the only here who has ever struggled this way.” That’s simply not true. The best thing to do for believers struggling with sexual sins is for them to confess those sins to someone who can serve as a mentor and accountability partner (a parent, pastor, elder, or mature friend will do). The worst thing to do in such circumstances is to try to keep the sin in the dark, because sin always grows in the dark. When brought out into the light, sin can be crucified. Don’t try to deal with these things on your own; get help from the body of Christ!

2. There are those in the church who struggle with same sex attraction, but know it’s wrong. Thus, they seek to live a celibate life. Some in this category will eventually be able to “straighten” out their sexual desires and even get married. But others will not; for them, same sex attraction will be a lifelong struggle. For those in this category, Justice Kennedy’s words about loneliness have a real appeal. Are such persons condemned to a lonely struggle? No! We must be there to help them and encourage them and be family for them. We need to reinforce the biblical call to chastity for such persons, but we also need to surround them with loving friendships to ease their pain. IF WE ARE NOT WILLING TO BEFRIEND SOMEONE STRUGGLING WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTION, WE HAVE LOST OUR RIGHT TO COMPLAIN ABOUT SAME SEX “MARRIAGE.” The church has to be an alternative family in such cases. We have to be able to say, “We will walk this road with you. We will come running when you cry out in loneliness. We will be your companions.” [Owen Strachan’s words are very appropriate:](#)

Huckabee and Rodgers make the same argument: it is unloving to require people who experience same-sex attraction (SSA) to remain celibate. (They don’t take as a practical option marrying someone of the opposite sex.) To do that is to consign them to life without joy, without companionship, without happiness. In opposing their wish to enter a same-sex relationship per the clear witness of texts like Romans 1:26-27, we drive them into despair and the arms of the LGBT community.

It is surely true that celibacy is a difficult road. We should empathize with all who yearn for union but cannot find it. If we hear the testimony of individuals who experience only same-sex attraction and just correct their views, we disobey Christ’s call to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). The ground for compassion is the incarnate Christ, who entered into our sorrows and wept at a fallen world (John 11:35).

But Christ does not only minister to us poor sinners. He sets an example for us. The argument that biblically faithful Christians deny people with SSA the

opportunity to be loved neglects much, including Christ's own model. Jesus did not marry. Jesus did not father children. Jesus lay by himself at night, with no one to warm him. In terms of a spouse, he had no inside jokes to share, no walks to take, no hand to hold, no anniversary to remember. If ever a single person feels strange for being unmarried, they may know that Jesus lived that same life.

The life of Christ was not easy, but he was the happiest man who ever lived. He drew disciples to himself. He poured out his life for the needy and desperate. He had close friends. By his blood, he created a family, a church, ensuring that all who came to him for salvation would never walk alone, but enter into a community that stretches over every boundary of the earth. The tired, the rejected, the prodigal, the baby choking on its blood in the wilderness — all these have a home, a name, and a future in Christ (Ezek. 16). This is the truth: a single man crucified for loving sinners has not only welcomed them as friends, but has joined them in marital covenant (Eph. 5:22-33). He is the head, the husband, and we follow him, the bride. All believers who are unmarried in this life will not remain so. Every day their feet hit the floor, they are one step closer to eternity, to full union with their Savior, to the furious unleashing of love that cannot be stopped and will never end. If Jesus, the son of God, could live all his days as a single person, we know that such a life must indeed be enchanted...

Among the numerous points made by Huckabee and Rodgers that are worth engaging, their theology of love gets my attention. Love is not complete, it seems, unless one is married or in a relationship. While I empathize with this struggle, I fear that these writers — and the many folks who are liking their posts — have lost sight of Christ, both his earthly example and his heavenly union.

The culture tells those pulled toward homosexuality that it has great things to offer them: affirmation and friendship and a community. Traditional Christianity, it says, offers them only judgment and loneliness. This can seem persuasive, but it's a counterfeit version of human flourishing. See what the Church, the true community, holds before us all: Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Christ, who bore our sins on the tree. Christ, a single man who never tousled his child's hair, who shared no marital intimacy, who knew none of the joys and struggles of earthly marriage.

Christ, who tasted the greatest love there is, the love of the Father, and who offers that same love to orphans, and widows, and people just like you and me, sinners all.

We need to recognize that one of the strongest appeals of the gay and lesbian community is that it really is a kind of community – a counterfeit community, but a community nonetheless. It really does provide camaraderie in many cases. As Rosaria Butterfield has warned parents, “You will have a hard time loving your child better than the LGBT community.” But that is exactly what we must do: our churches should show such love, hospitality, and graciousness, that every other

community out there pales in comparison. Butterfield says we can actually learn about love by watching the LGBT community in action – a sad but often true reality.

[In an article entitled “Something Better Than Marriage,” Butterfield and Christopher Yuan write:](#)

In 1999, when Jesus Christ revealed his saving grace and love to each of us, we learned that our unbelief, and the idolatrous sexual lusts that flowed from it, were no longer matters of personal choice. We accepted that following Jesus meant giving up everything. We understood that repentance meant fleeing from anything that embodied the temptations we knew best and loved most. But even prior to our conversion to Christ, God provided the love and care of Christians, people who became for us a new family, new brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers in Christ—who knew and loved us before we were safe to love. Christians loved, accepted, included, and surrounded us with biblical truth *while we were still sinners*, thus modeling the Lord himself. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit changed our hearts, we came to know this: the gospel is costly and worth it.

The days after the Supreme Court's ruling are like the days before it: God is seated on his throne in power and majesty—and one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess him.

We affirm that God has ordained marriage to be the union of a husband and a wife, which Jesus himself restated in [Mark 10:6–8](#) and [Matthew 19:4–5](#). But even though some in our culture believe, as Justice Kennedy wrote, that marriage “embodies the highest ideals of love,” we disagree. Earthly marriage does not have a monopoly on love. God is love ([1 John 4:7–19](#)). The pinnacle of love is his love for us in Christ. Nothing is greater.

In actuality, marriage is a mystery and a reflection of a greater reality. The highest ideal of love is Christ's love for his bride, the church. In Ephesians 5 and Revelation 21, marriage is revealed to be analogous to Christ's redemption: the marriage consummation between the bride (redeemed sinners) and the groom (Christ) shows all redeemed people are married to Christ. Only in Christ can anyone experience the full definition of love and acceptance. As important as earthly marriage and family are, they are both fleetingly temporary, while Christ and the family of God (the church) are wondrously eternal.

We have failed to show the LGBT community another option to marriage—which is singleness—lived out in the fruitful and full context of God's community, the family of God. This does not mean, as Justice Kennedy wrote, that singles are “condemned to live in loneliness,” but that singles can have intimate and fulfilling relationships full of love. This is not a consolation prize. It can be just as rewarding and fulfilling as marriage.

Defining marriage as being between a husband and a wife appears unfair to the LGBT community, in part because a life of singleness is seen to be crushingly lonely. Have we in the church inadvertently played into that lie

with our idolatry of marriage while being pejorative and silent toward singleness? If singleness is unfair, then it's no wonder marriage has become a right. Just as the LGBT community appealed to the rest of the world for dignity and respect, it's time for the church to fight for the dignity and respect of single women and single men.

Some are now comparing the Supreme Court's decision on gay marriage with the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion. Indeed, there is an important lesson for us to learn from the pro-life movement. Today, there are more pro-life young adults than others from previous generations who champion pro-life. When pro-life people, made up of more than just evangelical Christians, began fighting less and caring more for unborn babies and for women with unplanned pregnancies *just as they were*, a shift in focus brought about an important change. So the question now stands: will we begin caring for the LGBT community *just as they are*?

This is a defining moment in history. We have a faithful opportunity to shine for the gospel. Will we point people to marriage as the "highest ideal of love"? Or will we point people—whether married or single—to a life of costly discipleship pursuing the embodiment of love, Jesus Christ himself? The decision is ours to make.

3. What of those who have abortions? Is there living water for them? [Nancy Guthrie answers eloquently](#). Abortion is sin, but it is not the unforgiveable sin, any more than adultery or homosexuality. While we should not abandon the fight against abortion on the political front (especially with the recent gruesome revelations about Planned Parenthood), we should not make politics our main focus. We should especially focus our energies on loving and serving those in crisis pregnancy situations, providing a valuable alternative. We should focus on ministering to those who have had abortions (or paid for them, or performed them), but are now filled with regret. We need to bring the gospel of grace and the community of grace into their lives. Murders can be forgiven because was murdered for their sins; he took the death penalty the murderer deserves.

There are certainly other categories of sinners we need to reach besides the three I dealt with specifically in the sermon (e.g., divorced persons). But hopefully this provides a broad framework for understanding what gospel ministry should look like amidst the cultural wreckage of the sexual revolution.

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John 4:24 is a vital passage for understanding new covenant worship, but in the sermon, I had to gloss over it. I would suggest reading Jeff Meyers' *The Lord's Service*, [as well as his insightful posts, which deal with John 4:24 in relation to debates over the regulative principle of worship](#):

A New-Testament-only approach to the regulative principle invariably ends up advocating an overly inward, rationalistic approach to worship. The inward, spiritual, non-material movement of the mind is more important than the movement of the body (tongue or knees or hands) in worship. So anything material detracts from the true “spiritual” worship of the New Testament.

Here's an illustration of this: A long time ago in a church far, far away a seminary professor of mine, after participating in worship at our church, commented to me about how much he appreciated the times of silence in the service. “That was true spiritual worship!” he said. Now, I think times of silence in the worship service are fine, but they are definitely not more “spiritual” than when the congregation is belting out a vigorous hymn or Psalm. In the Bible the adjective “spiritual” means “of the Holy Spirit,” not something non-material or inward or mental as opposed to the material, physical, and outward.

This “spiritualizing” of the regulative principle of worship is the fourth distortion to analyze. It is often justified by a misreading of Jesus’ discussion with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus’ assertion in John 4:24 is often lifted from its context and dangerously misconstrued to function as a warning against all “outward” and “external” liturgical worship. A more literal translation, however, will help us understand what Jesus means by worshipping in “Spirit and truth”:

The [Samaritan] woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our Father’s bowed down [proskuneo] on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to bow down.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will your people bow down to the Father. Your people bow down to what you do not know; we bow down to the one we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here, when true worshippers will bow down to the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to bow down to him. God is Spirit, and those who bow down to him must bow down in Spirit and truth.” (John 4:19-24). Jesus is *not* saying that God is non-material, so therefore his worshippers must unite with him by means of their spirits or souls. He is not disparaging the body in worship or advocating some sort of “immaterial” worship, whatever that might be.

The NIV study Bible is quite wrong in its explanatory note: “The place of worship is irrelevant, because true worship must be in keeping with God’s nature, which is spirit.” Jesus is not redirecting genuine worship to inward, sincere worship. This follows from two considerations: 1) the meaning of the word proskuneo, often translated “to worship,” and 2) the redemptive-historical context of Jesus’ remarks.

First, the Greek verb *proskuneo* (used 9 times in 6 verses in John 4:20-26) means “to bow down,” “to kneel,” or “prostrate oneself.” Even though my translation of this passage is awkward, I have tried to bring out the ritual dimensions of the conversation by consistently translating *proskuneo* as “bow down.” One must remember the very concrete meaning of *proskuneo* in the ancient world. Doing “obeisance” means bending your body and placing yourself “under” another. When you *proskuneo*-ed before someone, you bowed down in their presence, even at their feet.

The English word “worship,” especially as it is used in modern times, is not a very helpful translation. One of the problems with our word “worship” is that it now refers to all sorts of activities, both physical and mental. In fact, a recent fad is to stress that all of life is “worship” and that genuine worship is mental and happens every day and all through the day in our minds and hearts. In some sense this is true, but only in a very loose sense. When used in this sense “worship” denotes a mental disposition.

But this is not the sense in which this word *proskuneo* or “bowing down” is ordinarily used in the Scriptures. If you want to say that all of life is “bowing down,” that is fine; but this can only be so in a very abstract or metaphorical way. If you are working hard on a painting job, for example, you may, indeed you should mentally give thanks and praise to God while you do so, but . . . you are not bowing down at that time with others in a congregation to offer praise and thanksgiving to God.

The woman and Jesus are not talking about this kind of mental attitude. Jesus is addressing the question of *where* one should bow down to the Father. It's all about the proper location. Jesus is talking about the ritual act of bowing down or kneeling before God in order to honor him and express one's proper devotion.

The Samaritan woman asks, in effect, “Where is the place, the location, where we should bow down to God?” We will see how Jesus answers that question in a moment, but for now simply attend to the kind of devotion in question. The activity in view here is what we might call “special” as opposed to “general” devotion. It is special in the sense that it happens at a known location and it involves the people of God in acts of embodied ritual devotion before God. Furthermore, the bowing down in question has to do with corporate or public worship, not private worship.

Bowing down, then, is a kind of synecdoche for everything the people of God *do* when they gather together in corporate worship. It simply has to be this. Everyone, both Jews and Samaritans knew that one could pray and praise and petition God, one could even get down on one's knees anytime or place. Individual bowing down was never restricted to the Temple or Jerusalem or

in Samaria, to Mt. Gerizim. Individual, private, mental worship had no restrictions in the Old Covenant.

Please, pay careful attention to this point. The big point being made by Jesus in this passage cannot be that now in the New Testament individuals can individually bow down, pray to, or mentally worship God wherever they want. That had always been the case. The controversy here is about *where* the people of Samaria should gather to bow down in special corporate worship. All special, corporate worship in the Bible is external and bodily and involves the biblical ritual (among others) of kneeling or bowing down.

So what did Jesus mean when he said that the time is coming when people would "bow down in Spirit and truth"?

Jesus' words—"worship in Spirit and truth"—must be understood according to the context of Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman. She had asked *where the proper place of worship should be*—Mt. Gerizim in Samaria or Mt. Zion in Jerusalem? Jesus responds with a prophetic statement, an utterance about something that will soon be in effect. At the time Jesus spoke to the woman, Jerusalem was the place where God had placed his Name. The Spirit descended in glory upon the tabernacle and temple. If you wanted to be faithful to the truth and enter into the environment of the Spirit, you went to Jerusalem with the people of God. In contrast to this, the Samaritans worshipped in ignorance. They bowed down as a people in the wrong place. There was no guarantee of the Spirit's presence on Mt. Gerizim. Jesus makes this clear. They were wrong to worship God on the mountain of their own choice.

But a time was coming—indeed, it was being inaugurated in Jesus' own ministry—when bowing down "faithfully" and "in the Spirit" could be done by God's people anywhere, not merely in Jerusalem. The post-Pentecost situation would radically decentralize corporate worship. Not individual worship. That had always been decentralized. The big change now would be that longer would worshipers gather together only at Jerusalem, but now the Spirit would be present wherever the church assembled in the Name of Jesus. That's what this passage is all about.

Today most commentators agree that in proclaiming worship "in Spirit and truth," Jesus was not contrasting external worship with internal worship. His statement has nothing to do with worshiping God in the inner resources of one's own spirit. The Spirit Jesus speaks of in this passage is the Spirit of God, not the spirit of man, as vs. 24 makes clear . . . . Jesus is speaking of the eschatological replacement of temporal institutions like the Temple, resuming the theme of 2:13-22. In 2:21 it was Jesus himself who was to take the place of the Temple, and here it is the Spirit given by Jesus that is to animate the worship that replaces worship at the Temple.

In John 4:24, therefore, Jesus is not emphasizing the importance of one's inner emotional experience. Jesus is not saying if you want to have genuine worship you must participate with your innermost spirit. If that was what Jesus was saying, then there would be nothing new about such an admonition. It was true in the Old Testament. If worship "in spirit" only meant that individuals should worship sincerely, honestly, with one's heart and soul, *such an assertion could not have answered the Samaritan woman's question.*

"Spirit" is not a description of God's non-material nature. We should not read this like this: God is a spirit. That is, God is in the category of what we call "spiritual, immaterial beings." That is not John's concern. The "S" should be capitalized. God is Spirit. This is not a statement about the "nature" of God, but of the way in which God is present to human beings, his dynamic relations with humanity. The Father gives the Spirit (John 14:1) and the Holy Spirit is the medium of his personal relations to us.

Compare this with 1 John 1:5 ("God is light") and 1 John 4:8 ("God is love"). These statements do not describe God's "nature," but his relational being. To say that "God is Spirit" in the context of a discussion about *the place* where one should bow down means that God will be properly worshiped wherever his Spirit is. We must be "in the Spirit" if we are to be in God's presence, the place where he is. This is similar to Jesus saying that one must be "born from above" and "born of water and Spirit" (John 3:3-8). The Spirit connects us with heaven, with the Father.

So if you want to worship the Father, you will be where the Spirit of truth is. Once again, I am not denying we can worship individually anywhere and anytime, and by the Spirit. That was true in Old Testament times as well. But there is a more specific sense of "in Spirit," which is in the community of believers gathered at a specific place for special worship. The context makes it clear that Jesus is speaking in this specific sense. It's as if the woman asked, "Where is the Spirit present so that we can be sure to be worshipping God in the right place? Is the Spirit in Jerusalem or on Mt. Gerizim?"

In the context of the Old Testament "bowing down in Spirit" meant gathering with the people of God for corporate, sacrificial worship wherever the tabernacle was pitched or at the site of the temple in Jerusalem. But not any more. The Spirit that descended and filled the old tabernacle and temple is the same Spirit that descended and remained upon Jesus, the true and final Temple.

In the new world, the place where God and man are united is in the flesh of Jesus. He is the new Temple (John 2:19-22). Jesus will ascend to heaven shortly after his discussion with the Samaritan woman, and he promised to



send the Spirit to indwell and empower his body, the church (John 14-16; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4). When the church gathers, the Spirit is there. Where the Spirit gathers the church, there is Christ. She is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21). And so worship to the Father occurs through Jesus and in the Spirit where the earthly temple of living stones is gathered (1 Pet. 2:5). Thus, in the New Testament, people who worship “in Spirit and truth” will gather with the Body of Christ to participate in Spiritual worship of the Father (1 Cor. 12:12-14).

Some have even used Jesus’ statement to argue that he was condemning all kinds of external and material worship—rituals, corporeal objects, and the rest. That doesn’t work. No way. Jesus is not speaking here about individual, in-your-thoughts worship. But about people and what they *do*. The Samaritan woman asked where one should “bow down,” that is, where is the proper place to bow down before God and experience his Spirit.

In the New Covenant God has not suddenly become available only to individuals who turn inward or seek some immaterial/spiritual means of communion. Nor has he become a “vagabond God” (Luther’s phrase), wandering here and there apart from any place. Rather just as God limited and bound himself to specified places and times and people in the Old Testament, so also in the New. This has not changed in the New Testament. We have not become disembodied spirit beings! We have no independent, immaterial access to God in the New Covenant. What we have is a different set of physical means appropriate to the change made in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

In the Old Covenant the place of corporate worship was one place and people—the tabernacle, the temple, the ark of the covenant, the altar, and the physical rituals of sacrifice that were performed at these centralized sites. We Christians, however, unlike the believers in the Old Testament, are no longer bound to one geographical location, to one physical temple at the center of the world. We no longer go to one nation that has been given the ministry of priestly intercession and ministry. The Spirit no longer binds himself to one location or one people. This is evident even in this passage. The living water that the woman receives (i.e., the Holy Spirit) wells up in her such that when her fellow towns people hear her witness, they too receive the living-water Spirit and believe (John 4:28-30, 39-42). And they are nowhere near Jerusalem!

What Jerusalem and the Jews were to the Old Testament—the place and ministers by which God met with men and women—Christ and his Body, the Church, are today. Jesus’ humanity is the place to which God summons us. Christ alone is the new sanctuary, the mercy seat, and the high priest through whom we must draw near to God. And Christ has given the Spirit to fill his Body, the Church, on earth so that she might be the place where humanity

finds God. She is the New Jerusalem. If we wish to worship God in Spirit and truth, we will seek God among his people, where the Word is audibly read and preached, where the physical sacraments are given and received. He still embodies his presence by the Spirit, but it is no longer a centralized, geographically limited embodiment.

The Spirit is given by Jesus (as John 14-17 will make clear). He is the proper environment of worship. And the Spirit brings men and women together in various places by the Spirit in order that they might worship God through the Messiah. In union with the humanity of Jesus, we have access to the Father through the Spirit. We bow before God in Christ in the environment of the Spirit. Luther reminds us that the ministry of the Holy Spirit “is thoroughly external and completely available to our sense . . . we see and hear the Holy Spirit in the dove, in tongues of fire, in baptism, and in a human voice.” Paul Althaus summarizes it well:

“Christ is present to us in very earthly ways. Everywhere in the history of revelation God embodies himself for us. His Spirit came in the form of a dove and the fiery tongues of Pentecost. And God still embodies himself for us. The Holy Spirit comes to us and brings Christ to us through the external, physical, sensible means of the word, of the human voice, and of the sacraments. God meets with us at trysting places (Luther’s evocative terminology). Where the people of God are gathered as the Church and there is baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the word of God on the lips of his ministers and all his believers—that is where God is. That is where we bow down in Spirit and truth.

I reject all four of the deformations of the Reformed regulative principle of worship. Much better is A. A. Hodge’s simple comments on the Westminster Confession of Faith 21.1. According to Hodge, this section teaches, “That God in his Word has prescribed for us how we may worship him acceptably; and that it is an offense to him and a sin in us either to neglect to worship and serve him in the way prescribed, or to attempt to serve him in any way not prescribed.”

This is a very productive summary of the regulative principle. It avoids the dangers of an unworkable, overly strict formulation (like “whatever is not commanded is forbidden.”). It does not, of course, answer all of our questions in advance. We must still do the hard work of biblical exegesis to determine precisely how God regulates worship. We can be confident, however, that God has prescribed for us in his Word how we may worship him acceptably. This authoritative prescription comes by way of command, principle, and example from both the Old and New Testaments.

[Meyers also writes on God’s special presence in worship:](#)

That we do in truth enter into God's special presence in the midst of his gathered congregation must never be slighted or forgotten. The reality of God's special presence with his people on the Lord's Day has come under considerable attack in recent years. All of life is worship, we are told. God is present everywhere all through the week; therefore, what we do on Sunday is not really any different than what we do on other days. God cannot be more present on one day or in one place over against another. So let's drop all this talk about "coming into God's presence" when we gather for worship at church.

What are we to think about this kind of reasoning? Well, for one thing, it is certainly true that God is present everywhere. But his omnipresence is not what I am referring to when I talk about God's *special presence* with his people on the Lord's Day. God has promised to be present with his people in a special manner when they gather on Sunday. The one who skips church for the golf course or shopping mall or State park may not argue from God's omnipresence to justify his not being in church. Sure, God is present on the golf course, just as he is present in hell. But this general presence of God doesn't do the people in hell much good. Think about it. God is present in heaven and hell, but he is not present *in the same way* in each of these locations. There is a huge difference.

Even if we cannot define it precisely, God is nonetheless present in a heightened, special sense when his people gather as the church on the Lord's Day. For one thing, he is present there *pro nobis* ("for us"). This is the place and time where he gathers his people to hear and receive his gifts through the Word and Sacraments. He has promised to be there for us when his people gather.

It is not so much that God was not present in, say, China, when the pillar and fire led the people of Israel out of Egypt or when his presence filled the Tabernacle upon its completion (Ex. 40). Rather, the Lord was at these appointed places in a special, life-giving way. The people of Israel were given singular signs of God's special presence as they gathered around Mt. Sinai and the Tabernacle.

Similarly, it is not that God is absent from the food court in the mall on Sunday; rather, he has promised to be present in a special way, the way of salvation and blessing, at the Communion Table in church. The bread and wine are singular signs designed to assure us of his special, gracious presence with us. He has not promised to be in the mall on Sunday *for you*. Actually, if you refuse to heed the Lord's summons to gather with his church, he may be present there *against you* so that you could very well experience his judgment and curse, rather than his promise of blessing, life, and salvation.

Moreover, when we are in God's special presence with his people every week, receiving from him his promise through his Word and Sacrament, we can leave the gathered congregation into the world with the full assurance that God will be with us and for us wherever we may be during the week. Without being in the Lord's special presence we have no assurance that his general presence will be of benefit to us. When delight in his special presence then we can be sure of his omnipresent help in every situation and location (see Gen. 3:8; 4:16; Exod. 33:14-15; Deut. 4:37; Deut. 12:7, 18; 14:23, 26; 15:20; Judges 18:6; 2 Kings 13:23; 17:18-23; Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 5:4; 11:18ff.; etc.).

As Luther has said, God is not a wandering "vagabond God" who cannot be found. Instead, he has established "trysting places (again, Luther's term), where he meets with his people through Word and sacraments, to give himself to them. Worship "in Spirit and truth" is worship that takes place in the new covenant realities (the heavenly sanctuary), which has fulfilled and surpassed the old covenant shadows (temple and priesthood and sacrifices in Jerusalem). To worship "in Spirit" is to worship in the environment created by the Spirit (Rev. 4-5). To worship "in truth" is to worship "in Christ" (the truth, per John 14:6), in whom and through whom we ascend into the heavenlies (Heb. 10).

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No discussion of John would complete with out reference to this scene in C. S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair*:

The birds had ceased singing and there was perfect silence except for one small, persistent sound, which seemed to come from a good distance away. She listened carefully, and felt almost sure it was the sound of running water. Jill got up and looked round her very carefully. There was no sign of the lion; but there were so many trees about that it might easily be quite close without her seeing it. . . . But her thirst was very bad now, and she plucked up her courage to go and look for that running water. . . .

The wood was so still that it was not difficult to decide where the sound was coming from. It grew clearer every moment and, sooner than she expected, she came to an open glade and saw the stream, bright as glass, running across the turf a stone's throw away from her. But although the sight of water made her feel ten times thirstier than before, she didn't rush forward to drink. She stood as still as if she had been turned to stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason: Just on this side of the stream lay the Lion. . . .

How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

"If you're thirsty, you may drink." . . .

For a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again,  
"If you are thirsty, come and drink." . . .  
It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy, golden voice. . . .  
"Are you thirsty?" said the Lion.  
"I'm dying of thirst," said Jill.  
"Then drink," said the Lion.  
"May I — could I — would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.  
The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. . . . The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. . . .  
"Do you eat girls?" she asked fearfully.  
"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.  
"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.  
"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.  
"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."  
"There is no other stream," said the Lion.

The message of John 4 is simple: There is no other stream. Jesus is our only possible source of living water. Come to him and drink!

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[More from Moore on the sexual revolution's refugee crisis:](#)

This past weekend I met a couple who were married on the Fourth of July and baptized on the fifth. They had been cohabiting for many years and had several children together. They had never known anyone who was part of a church. But when their lives didn't turn out the way that they hoped, they were willing to try anything, including a local church. There they ran into an old gospel, and new life. As I watched them plunged into the waters of baptism—and as I heard their three year-old son yell from his pew "Wow!"—I thought about how their story may well be the story of the coming generations.

The Sexual Revolution certainly seems triumphant. After a generation of no-fault divorce, cohabitation, ubiquitous pornography, and the cultural unhinging of sex from marriage and marriage from childbearing, we now see the courts and the culture decoupling marriage from even its most basic reality: gender. And there are hints on the horizon that the next step is to culturally, and perhaps legally, decouple marriage from, well, couples. If sexuality is about personal expression and individual autonomy, after all, then by what right can society deem that sexuality should be limited by such an arbitrary number as two?

The danger for Christians is that we buy into the Sexual Revolution's narrative. I don't just mean that we accommodate ourselves to the sins and heresies of the movement, although that's always a danger too. I mean the danger is that we assume that the Sexual Revolution will always be triumphant, progressing upward and onward. To assume such is to assume that the Sexual Revolution will be able to keep its promises. It can't. We live, after all, in a cosmos ordered around the Logos of God, a Logos we have come to know personally as Jesus of Nazareth (Jn. 1:1-14). Part of the wisdom of the universe is the resilience of the marital one-flesh union. Marriage, and the limits of sexuality, not only pictures the gospel (Eph. 5:32), it is also the way that human beings thrive and flourish. We think we want autonomy and novelty and transgression. What really satisfies though is fidelity and complementarity and incarnational love.

That's why I say the church should prepare for the Sexual Revolution's refugees. We should understand why the culture around us is exuberant. They believe this will make them happy, that their alienation has been a result of cultural marginalization or Puritan repression. But the primary problem we all have is internal. There's a conscience that speaks to us of a word we want to hide from—"Where are you, and where are you going?" There are two sorts of churches that won't be able to reach the refugees of the future.

The first is the church that is so scared of people that we scream at them in anger and condemnation. If we see ourselves as people who are "losing" a culture rather than people who have been sent on a mission to a culture, this is how we will be. That will be exacerbated if we take our cues from those who play outraged Christian caricatures for a living rather than from those who have come to seek and to save that which was lost. If we do not love our mission field, we will have nothing to say to it.

The second sort of church that will fail these refugees is the church that gives up, or silences, its convictions because they're not popular. This too is fear. We assume that we can reach people if we dance around the sexual questions, thinking that we can get to that part of discipleship after they're part of the family. That's just not the way Jesus does it. Jesus gets right at the point of guilt, the part the person is protecting, and calls the person not only to repentance but also to forgiveness and freedom (Jn. 4:16).

If we are silent about what the gospel says about sexual immorality, we will not only lose our mission, but we will also lose the respect of those we are seeking to reach. They can read texts. All the gymnastics of the revisionists does nothing to silence what honest people read in our Scriptures. When they hear us clearing our throats in embarrassment or explaining away things unfashionable at the moment, they hear from us that we are more afraid of them than we are confident in our gospel. How then can they trust us with words of life that can overpower the grave, when they see that we are not even willing to go against the spirit of the age?

The Sexual Revolution cannot keep its promises. Many people are going to be disappointed, and even before they can admit it to others or to themselves,

they are going to ask, “Is this all there is?” We need churches that can keep the light lit to the old paths, that can keep the waters of baptism ready. We need to be the people who can remind a wounded world of what we’ve come to hear and believe, “Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). That’s good news for refugees, like us.

And again:

If we are going to be a gospel people, however the Supreme Court decides, we cannot hate the people who disagree with us. We cannot give up on the power of the gospel to change minds and to regenerate hearts. We also cannot fear the Sexual Revolutionaries so much that we capitulate on the truth of the only gospel that can save them, and us. The gospel is a call to repentance, and we must stand on that, but it is also a call to mercy for all those who repent.

We then must have enough confidence in our gospel to stand with conviction, even when the world thinks we’re crazy. And we must have enough confidence in our gospel to stand with kindness toward those who disagree with us. God loves the world. Jesus saves sinners. No one will enter the kingdom of God who does not repent of sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:9-10). But God takes no delight in the exile of the lost. He has sent us not to condemn the world but to point the world to a curse-bearing, sin-canceling Christ. Our good news is only good if it’s true, and that means telling the truth about the Judgment Seat. And our good news is only good if it speaks with an invitation to life for all who repent and believe.

Let’s stand with the ancient truth of God’s word—about marriage and sexuality and everything else. And let’s stand with the truth of God’s word—that Jesus delights in saving sinners, any sinners who will come. Let’s speak that gospel to the men in the dresses and to the men with the megaphones, and everyone in between.

And again:

The current debates over whether marriage is a good, over whether children need mothers and fathers, over whether sexual expression should be bound by the covenantal reality of the male–female one-flesh union, spring from a very different reading of the universe, one that assumes an entirely different understanding of human ecology. Western culture now celebrates casual sexuality, cohabitation, no-fault divorce, family redefinition, and abortion rights as parts of a sexual revolution that tore down old patriarchal systems. But the Sexual Revolution is not liberation at all, but simply the imposition of a different sort of patriarchy. The Sexual Revolution empowers men to pursue a Darwinian fantasy of the predatory alpha-male, rooted in the values of power, prestige, and personal pleasure. Does anyone really believe these things will empower women or children? We see the wreckage of sexuality as self-expression all around us, and we will see more yet. And the stakes are not merely social or cultural but profoundly spiritual.

Every culture has recognized that there is something about sexuality that is more than merely the firing of nerve endings, that there is something mysterious here, the joining of selves. In the Evangelical Christian perspective, this is because there is no such thing as a casual sexual encounter at all, when we are speaking in spiritual terms. The Apostle Paul warned that the sexually immoral person sins not just against another but "against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18). He compared the spiritual union formed between Christ and the believer with the union brought about in the sexual act. Even one who is "joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her," he wrote, citing Genesis.

The sexual act, mysteriously, forms a real and personal union. Immorality is not merely "naughtiness," but is a sermon, a sermon preaching a different gospel. This is why attempts to "free" sexuality from marriage as the union of a man and a woman do not lead, ultimately, to the sort of liberation they promise. And therein is our challenge, and our opportunity, for the future.

Read more: <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=28-02-022-c#ixzz3gw3BtJNC>

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Jesus witnesses to the woman, who in turn witnesses to her village, who in turn witness to the world (cf. John 4:42).

Note Jesus' evangelistic strategy. He is perfectly balanced. We tend to be either too confrontational, or too mushy. Jesus is both firm and kind. Ultimately, he commits himself to her, as the only one who can satisfy her thirst. But in order for her to receive him, she has to acknowledge the reality of her sin and brokenness.

Note also the Samaritan woman's evangelistic program. She does not call on the villagers to adopt a new morality, or read a book, or attend a seminar (any of which could be useful but are not the main point). She says "Come and see." She invites them to meet Jesus. She presents him as the one and only Thirst Quencher.

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God is worthy of worship, but we are worthy to give it? Only through Christ! In Spirit and in truth means that the Spirit and Savior mediate our worship of the Father. Our service to the Father is sharing in the service the Son and Spirit are already offering him.

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Forgiveness does not erase the consequences of sin (at least not all of them in this life). To be forgiven, sin has to be acknowledged as sin. Forgiveness includes a just



accusation, "You have done wrong! You are condemned." There is no forgiveness when sin is not regarded as heinously sinful, or when it is swept under the rug. But following on the heels of identifying sin for what it is, forgiveness says, "You have done wrong. But I absorb the wrong. I will not hold it against you. I will separate you from the wrong you have done. I hate your sin, but I love you. I condemn your wrongdoing, but I acquit you, the wrongdoer."

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There have been a series of troubling sexual scandals involving high profile pastors in recent years. To some degree, this may be a product of a strange twist Reformed theology has taken in recent years in which failure is actually celebrated as a way of magnifying the grace of God. In some Reformed circles, glamorizing moral failure has become a way of preaching "grace." The role of the law in the Christian life is rejected or at least minimized. For example, Tullian Tchividjian has said that 1 John 5:3-4 means that "God's commandments are not burdensome because we do not carry them." He also denies that the parable of the Good Samaritan provides a template for Christian love; its purpose is to show us that we cannot keep the law. He argues that we will be sanctified not by striving to keep God's commands but by realizing and giving thanks for our justification.

But this is simply not the teaching of Scripture, and ironically, creates a new legalism. If my sanctification flows out of my gratitude for my justification, then that puts an awful lot of pressure on my psychological feelings of thanksgiving. Biblically, sanctification, like justification flows out of our Spirit-wrought, faith-created union with Christ (Calvin's *duplex gratia*). Scripture uses a variety of means to drive us forward in the sanctification process (including threats, promises of reward, the design of the law, etc., and yes, gratitude for our justification), but Christ dwelling in us by his Spirit is the ultimate source of transformation. The living water he gives us (his Spirit, per John 7) not only brings cleansing but also transformation.

Here are some helpful links to counter the current antinomianish view that teaches "sanctification by realization":

<http://www.reformation21.org/articles/my-offer-to-publicly-debate.php>

<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2014/05/13/what-we-all-agree-on-and-what-we-probably-dont-in-this-sanctification-debate/>

<http://theaquilareport.com/the-grace-boys/>

<http://theaquilareport.com/revisiting-the-grace-boys/>

<http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2011/08/sanctification-and-the-nature.php>

<http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2011/08/a-question-of-balance-some-fin.php>

<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/failure-is-not-a-virtue>

I recommend Mark Jones' book *Antinomianism* and Kevin Deyoung's *Hole in Our Holiness*.