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## Developing A Biblical Approach To Counseling Students On Gender And Sexuality At Rhody Christian Fellowship

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DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO COUNSELING  
STUDENTS ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY AT  
RHODY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Larry Matthew Henderson  
May 2022

**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO COUNSELING  
STUDENTS ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY AT  
RHODY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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This project is dedicated to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has called me to minister to college students and point them to an everlasting hope in Him.

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## PREFACE

I am eternally grateful to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for His grace. It is “in view of God’s mercy” (Rom 12:1) that this project was undertaken, and it is my prayer that multitudes will come to know His mercy and truth through this study. I am thankful for the strength and perseverance granted to me to see this project to its completion. May it serve the church well and help to equip the saints.

This project would also not have been possible without the constant support and love of my wife, Alis. She is a constant encouragement and help to me, a tremendous partner in ministry, and a gift from God. I will always give thanks to the Lord for the undeserved blessing that Alis is to me.

Finally, I would like to thank the faculty and staff of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who have walked with me and helped me cross the finish line of this project. I appreciate Dr. Matt Haste and Dr. John David Trentham for the time they invested in me. I have grown through this process, and I hope that I will continue to be able to pass on to others the wisdom I have gained over the past several years. I pray that we will all continue to devote our lives to making disciples who will serve Jesus and to glorify Him in all that we do (Col 3:17).

Matt Henderson

Kingston, Rhode Island

May 2022

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The mission of Rhody Christian Fellowship (RCF) at the University of Rhode Island (URI) and The Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) is to help students know and follow Jesus Christ in their daily lives. College ministries are on the front lines of a strategic mission field and are able to reach out to many students on college campuses who would not think of stepping foot in a church. With a great number of students having never heard the gospel before, RCF can impact students from around the world simply by reaching out to a university campus. Through this campus ministry, students are coming to know Jesus and learning how to follow Him through the Scripture. This mission is being accomplished primarily through weekly Bible studies, prayer gatherings, and one-to-one and small group discipleship. RCF has a unique opportunity to reach students with the gospel, train and equip them in the faith, and connect them with a church. Students are only on campus for a limited amount of time (generally two to five years), but the impact of those years can have a far-reaching effect. As students graduate, they can step into leadership roles in their local church because of the training they received through the ministry of RCF while in college. Therefore, RCF has a greater impact on the church around the world than many realize. Throughout the years, RCF has implemented biblical counseling resources to personally help students and to equip them for ministry in the church. This project aimed to address one of the greatest challenges on the college campus and within the ministry: to help provide a framework for counseling students biblically on the issues of gender and sexuality.

## **Context**

RCF was established at URI in 2012 with a vision to make disciples who make disciples. In 2018, the ministry was expanded to include CCRI. RCF exists as an extension of local churches to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) by helping to reach and minister to college students. Since New England is consistently ranked low when it comes to the present-day influence of Christianity and the Bible in the United States, it is not surprising that the evangelical churches in Rhode Island are few in number and small in size. Most of the churches have only one staff member, which is the pastor. With such small churches and small staff, the time and resources available to the church to reach a large university is extremely limited. RCF helps to fill this need. When I founded RCF at URI, it was with the hope of having multiple full-time workers on the campus to invest in students' lives. As the largest university in Rhode Island, URI was largely devoid of biblical discipleship and people who could counsel biblically. And it was obvious that students were more heavily influenced by the New England culture surrounding them than by the church or the Bible.

## **The Challenge**

A student's time in college happens during one of the most pivotal moments in his or her life. According to a 2013 study which interviewed older adults about their life stories, the ages of 17-24 were most often referenced by those adults.<sup>1</sup> The college years are indeed formative because during that time students are typically determining their career path and forming lifelong friendships. More importantly, students in college are solidifying their belief systems. Since many students leave home to attend a university, they are often exposed to new ideas and worldviews that they have not faced before, and this context forces them to decide what they truly believe. These ideas and worldviews are presented by professors in the university classrooms, but also through daily life on

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<sup>1</sup> Kristina L. Steiner et al., "The Reminiscence Bump in Older Adults' Life Story Transitions," *Memory* 22, no. 8 (2013): 1002-9.

campus by a student's friends and classmates. Some beliefs being challenged across the nation are the traditional biblical beliefs regarding gender and sexuality. While the challenge to biblical definitions of gender and sexuality is happening across the nation in the political sphere, it is especially occurring on college campuses where many universities are creating departments and forming studies specifically for gender and sexuality. For example, URI has established a Gender and Sexuality Center, where its vision is to eradicate what they consider to be any oppression, hate, or even bias language and action toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.<sup>2</sup> This environment provides a significant challenge for students who hold to biblical values. Traditional biblical values can often be perceived as hateful or biased. Considering such a threat, many students sit back and strive to say nothing that would be considered offensive, while others cave to the pressure of full acceptance toward LGBT lifestyles. The RCF ministry on the URI campus strives to address this problem by equipping students with biblical teaching and discipleship that will help them gain a biblical understanding of how God calls His people to live.

The ministry of RCF has seen many different issues and faced various challenges over the past five years. Students within the ministry have dealt with depression and anxiety. Others have had issues with alcohol, which is extremely prevalent on the URI campus. Some have struggled with the academic pressures. However, the issue that has seemed to have a significant rise in recent years is the topic of gender and sexuality. This issue arises in various forms. Some students are personally struggling with questions about their own gender or sexuality. Other students know someone dealing with those questions and do not know how to help them or answer questions from a biblical perspective. The struggle often increases as students are taught about gender and sexuality from a secular worldview by professors in the classroom and through media, making it

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<sup>2</sup> The University of Rhode Island Gender and Sexuality Center, "Vision," accessed February 27, 2017, <http://web.uri.edu/gender-sexuality/about/>.

difficult for Christian students to hold firmly to biblical truth.

### **Strengths of the Ministry**

RCF currently has over thirty students involved on both campuses, so the group is large enough to make a wide impact on each campus yet small enough to give students individual attention. In addition to providing fellowship and opportunities for spiritual growth, RCF sponsors multiple campus-wide outreach events each semester, giving away free snacks to connect with students on campus. But one of the major strengths of RCF is that, since its inception, the ministry has always had a strong focus on expository teaching of the Bible. In contrast to many other college ministries which may focus on select popular topics for students, the RCF staff teaches verse by verse through entire books of the Bible. This approach helps students to gain a greater knowledge of the whole counsel of Scripture in its proper context. Therefore, students who are consistently involved at RCF have a general understanding and belief that the Bible is the foundation for knowing God and His will. RCF also has a strong discipleship ministry in place in which most active students are involved in one-to-one or small group discipleship. Such a ministry gives RCF staff and student leaders the opportunity to spend more time with students, finding out their needs and struggles and helping guide them to the truth of God. Because of these strengths, there is a good potential for students to go beyond simply helping one another to have a quiet time with God, share their faith, keep one another accountable, and grow in spiritual disciplines. Biblical counseling is frequently modeled in discipleship, and the principles are taught throughout students' time at RCF so that they can learn how to give biblical counsel to one another, and to their peers.<sup>3</sup> The lessons from this project intended to increase students' understanding of gender and sexuality issues in a way that would further their application of biblical counseling principles.

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the biblical counseling resources included Paul David Tripp and Timothy S. Lane, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith, *Untangling Emotions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); and Edward T. Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997).

## The Need

In a 2013 Pew Research study, it was reported that the average ages when the study's participants knew for sure and told someone that they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual was generally between the ages of 15 and 21 years old.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, many students are making this decision about their sexuality during their college years. If a student is not directly making their own decision toward an LGBT lifestyle, then they almost always have friends or peers who are making such a decision. A recent Gallup study reported that "Roughly 21% of Generation Z Americans who have reached adulthood—those born between 1997 and 2003—identify as LGBT. That is nearly double the proportion of millennials who do so, while the gap widens even further when compared with older generations."<sup>5</sup> While this is a difficult subject matter on which campus ministers are now having to counsel students, it is an even greater challenge for students to know what to say to their peers. If a significant impact is going to be made in helping students think biblically about gender and sexuality, then it will be because they are equipped to communicate God's truth clearly and compassionately with their friends and classmates. College students are often highly influenced by their peers, so having students who can biblically counsel their peers could make a dramatic impact on a great number of individuals on the URI campus.

While the larger church in the United States has recently begun to address homosexuality specifically, it is difficult to keep up with the constant barrage of new issues surrounding gender and sexuality. In the current state, RCF staff might be able to present solid biblical counsel to a student struggling with homosexuality. However, if a student is claiming to be transgender, it would present a different challenge. Or perhaps a student says that their same-sex attraction is not wrong as long as they refuse to act on those feelings.

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<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, "A Survey of LGBT Americans: Attitudes, Experiences and Values in Changing Times," Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 13, 2013, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans/>.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, "LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%," Gallup Organization, February 17, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>.

Each of those issues are situations that the college ministers and student leaders can expect to face on a more frequent basis in the years to come. Without a plan and proper training, students and ministry leaders alike will be unprepared to help struggling students find answers and hope in Christ.

### **Rationale**

Like most small collegiate ministries, during most of the ministry's existence RCF has had only two staff members to work on the campus of over 15,000 students. To have an effective ministry, it is imperative that the staff train students to disciple and counsel other students. However, to train others, the staff must be equipped to counsel regarding the most pressing issues. It would be beneficial to not only be aware of the many arguments that support the world's viewpoint on gender and sexuality and be able to give a comprehensive answer based on the sufficiency of Scripture, but to also have a strategic approach to address the subject. The curriculum developed through this project aims to speak not only to the outward behavior of an individual or the academic mindset, but most importantly to the heart. To modify the attitudes of a college student regarding gender and sexuality, the curriculum is designed to demonstrate how the gospel changes one's heart to desire what God desires.

### **Personal Growth**

Upon completion of this project, the RCF staff should have gained a greater knowledge and ability to communicate biblical truth about gender and sexuality. With a more knowledgeable staff, that wisdom can be passed on and students will ultimately benefit. This project sought to develop a strategy and curriculum to help college students gain a biblical knowledge on the subject. At the completion of the project, the intention was for students to be able to see how Scripture is sufficient to guide and counsel, even on difficult topics such as gender and sexuality. By seeing that Scripture provides guidance and principles that apply to this area of life, their faith should be increased, and they will

learn to look to Scripture for other principles that guide their decisions. For students who are personally struggling with the LGBT lifestyle, this project helps to address the matter and compassionately point them to repentance and hope in Christ.

### **Helping Others**

Since a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality is lacking among most students, it presents a hurdle for Christian students to talk confidently with their peers on the subject. Students are typically afraid to address gender and sexuality issues with friends and classmates often for fear of saying the wrong thing or because they do not know what Scripture says. For instance, one argument for homosexuality as a legitimate, biblical lifestyle today says that in Romans 1, the apostle Paul was not condemning all homosexual relationships, but those of “excess” and lustful relationships.<sup>6</sup> The average Christian student might be taken aback that the opposition is using Scripture to endorse homosexuality. Therefore, this project was designed to help students gain a greater confidence in talking with others about gender and sexuality, and answering misinterpretations of Scripture. The curriculum developed through this project should increase students’ knowledge of the subject and of Scripture, and will benefit them into the future as they seek to give counsel to peers. Whether their friends are personally struggling with questions about gender and sexual identity, or they are struggling with their faith due to questions on the topic, this project helps equip students to counsel biblically.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to help students and college ministry leaders grow in the biblical knowledge of gender and sexuality in order to equip students to biblically counsel one another at Rhody Christian Fellowship at the University of Rhode Island and The Community College of Rhode Island.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014), 114.

## **Goals**

Three goals guided this project. The process of achieving these goals was for them to progressively build upon one another, with the last being the ultimate intent of the project. The goals were as follows:

1. The first goal was to assess the current views of gender and sexuality among RCF students.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum to train leaders and students on biblical gender and sexuality so that students could utilize the curriculum in counseling other students.
3. The third goal was to equip RCF leaders and students to respond to other students based on a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality and biblical counseling principles by utilizing the six-week curriculum.

Once each of these goals were achieved, the hope was that the ministry would see a significant impact on the university campus. The overarching desire was to see students who place their faith in Christ and trust in God's Word to be the guiding source for their thinking and actions. These three goals helped the RCF ministry take steps toward achieving that overarching ministry ambition. The method by which these three goals were achieved will be explained in the following section.

## **Research Methodology**

The first goal of this project was to assess the current views of gender and sexuality among RCF students. This goal was measured by administering a survey that has been created for this project.<sup>7</sup> The survey was given to all available RCF students at the University of Rhode Island and the Community College of Rhode Island.<sup>8</sup> The assessment survey included questions about the student's attitude toward gender, sexuality, and the sufficiency of Scripture to speak to these issues.<sup>9</sup> This goal was to be

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<sup>7</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project

<sup>8</sup> The survey was given to students who attend Bible study at RCF. Approximately thirty students were involved in weekly Bible study during the fall semester of the 2021-2022 school year.

<sup>9</sup> See appendix 1.

considered successfully met when at least twenty students completed the survey, and the data was analyzed yielding a clearer understanding of RCF students' views.

The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum to train leaders and students on biblical gender and sexuality so that students could utilize the curriculum in counseling other students. The curriculum included biblical topics such as God's created design for sex and marriage, the distortion of God's design by humanity, and the way Jesus Christ redeemed humanity. This goal was measured by an expert panel, consisting of an ACBC certified biblical counselor and a local pastor. The panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.<sup>10</sup> This second goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. Any sections that did not initially meet the criteria were revised until it met the standard.

The third goal of this project was to equip RCF students to respond to their peers based on a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality and biblical counseling principles. This goal was measured by administering a survey before and after the curriculum was taught and evaluating the responses for increased biblical knowledge and modified attitudes.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, students participated in a role play with a campus minister to demonstrate how they would counsel another student. Participants were expected to demonstrate a score at or above the sufficient level on all criteria listed on the role play evaluation rubric.<sup>12</sup> This third goal was to be considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the survey scores before and after the curriculum is taught.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>11</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>12</sup> See appendix 3.

<sup>13</sup> See appendix 4. Neil J. Salkind and Leslie A. Shaw, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics Using R* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2020), 277.

## Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

*Biblical counseling.* The definition of *biblical counseling*, as explained by Robert Jones, Kristin Kellen, and Rob Green, is “the Christlike, caring, person-to-person ministry of God's Word to people struggling with personal and interpersonal problems to help them know and follow Jesus in heart and behavior amid their struggles.”<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this project, *biblical counseling* is referred to as informally giving guidance, not professional therapy. Jones, Kellen, and Green state, “In one sense, every human counsels people. We all have opinions and give advice to others—whether that advice is godly or ungodly, solicited or unsolicited, thoughtful or thoughtless. Counseling others is endemic to our humanity.”<sup>15</sup> Heath Lambert emphasizes that biblical counseling is typically understood as communicating that “the Bible is sufficient because Christ is sufficient, and God shows us in his Word how to encounter him in all of life’s complexities. Biblical counselors trust they have what they need for counseling because they believe the promise of these resources in the faithfulness of God in Christ.”<sup>16</sup> The key issue that separates biblical counseling from other Christian counseling is the sufficiency of Scripture, as opposed to using secular psychologies. This project focused on counseling using Scripture alone.

*Gender.* *Gender* can be most simply defined as being male or female, so it is directly connected to one’s biological sex. Denny Burk notes, “Gender is not merely a sociological construct that fluctuates according to one’s time or culture. In the Scripture, there is an organic connection between biological sex and gender roles. And one’s

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<sup>14</sup> Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: B & H, 2021), 20, Kindle.

<sup>15</sup> Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Heath Lambert, “Introduction: The Sufficiency of Scripture, the Biblical Counseling Movement, and the Purpose of This Book,” in *Counseling the Hard Cases*, ed. Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 13.

biological sex determines what one's gender role should be."<sup>17</sup> Although many in modern society see gender as socially constructed, this project defines *gender* in the traditional sense of being tied to one's biological sex.

*Sexuality.* *Sexuality* is generally defined in terms of a person's sexual desires and sexual activity. One lifespan development author noted that *sexuality* is a very broad term and refers to "activities that are clearly associated with sex" as well as other behaviors and feelings "such as affection and love."<sup>18</sup> A Christian definition would be more specific, allowing only sexual activity between a husband and wife in marriage. Gregg Allison writes, "The general framework for human sexuality" includes, by the design of God, sexual activity between "a husband and wife who have covenanted together to be in a monogamous, unbreakable relationship," for the purposes of "one flesh" union (as expressed in Gen 2:24), procreation, pleasure, and physical intimacy.<sup>19</sup>

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the participants consisted of RCF students who attended Bible study. Second, participants were required to complete at least five of six weeks of the curriculum. To gain an accurate understanding of the curriculum's effectiveness, students committed to completing the study before sharing their feedback. If a participant could not attend a session where the curriculum was being taught, an alternate method was offered for the student to complete the material.

## **Conclusion**

God has designed and defined gender and sexuality for humanity. Today's American culture has moved toward an individual's own right to define gender and sexuality based on feelings, not on truth. College students are consistently deceived into trusting their feelings over the truth of Scripture. It is crucial that humans not deviate

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<sup>17</sup> Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 167.

<sup>18</sup> Guy R. Lefrancois, *The Lifespan* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984), 30.

<sup>19</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 85-86.

from God's design, as found in Scripture. Chapter 2 of this project will examine the biblical model for gender and sexuality.

CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT  
FOR COUNSELING STUDENTS ON  
GENDER AND SEXUALITY

The legalization of gay marriage in recent years has heightened discussions about gender and sexuality. Following the United States Supreme Court decision to legalize gay marriage in June of 2015, some Americans have conceded that the battle is over. The attitudes and views of many people in the country have continued to trend in favor of gay marriage.<sup>1</sup> The public is generally accepting that marriage is based on merely two consenting adults who claim to love one another, regardless of gender. However, this acceptance has prompted further discussion about other gender and sexuality issues, such as polyamory and transgenderism.<sup>2</sup> There seems to be no end to the distortion unless people recover the original basis and design for human gender and sexuality. The Bible is still relevant today, even regarding these difficult issues. As the younger generation grows up in a society where gay marriage has been the norm, it will be increasingly difficult to change their minds. There is a great need for all people to hear and understand that gender and sex were created purposefully by God. If they can come to a biblical understanding of God's original design for gender and sex, as well as how sin came into the world to distort all areas of life, then they will build a foundation on truth as opposed to society's shifting views. Ultimately, today's generation of students need to understand how God has been working throughout history to redeem sinners, and how He has

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research, "Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage," Pew Internet & American Life Project, June 26, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Barry, "A Massachusetts City Decides to Recognize Polyamorous Relationships," *The New York Times*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/us/somerville-polyamorous-domestic-partnership.html>.

accomplished this through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This chapter will provide a biblical basis for gender distinctions and the original intent of sexuality by focusing on the creation account in Genesis 1–2. The chapter will also reveal how the fall of humanity impacted the human perspective of gender (distinctions and roles) and the distortion of human sexuality, all of which have continued from Genesis 3 to Romans 1 and even to modern times.

### **Gender Distinctions**

For thousands of years, the understanding of gender has been determined by the biological sex of an individual, as opposed to a social construction or one’s feelings. By contrast, those who advocate for gender as a social construct say it is “the result of sociocultural influences throughout an individual’s development.”<sup>3</sup> They believe the characteristics that make up a person’s gender are merely learned. Therefore, families are now attempting to raise children in a gender-neutral way, without influencing the child to choose between only male or female.<sup>4</sup> Some also insist that their biological sex does not match up with the gender they believe they are inside. Such a belief is now referred to as “gender dysphoria.”<sup>5</sup> Those who advocate for gender identity based upon feelings even say that gender can be “fluid.” In other words, a person’s gender is not fixed and can change over time. The Bible gives a different narrative.

The creation account in Genesis details God’s creation of the earth, animals, and mankind. Victor Hamilton writes, “Unlike animals, man is not broken down into

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine T. Kwantes, Sherry Bergeron, and Ritu Kaushal, “Applying Social Psychology to Diversity,” in *Applied Social Psychology: Understanding and Addressing Social and Practical Problems*, ed. Frank W. Schneider, Jamie A. Gruman, and Larry M. Coutts, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 331.

<sup>4</sup> Julie Compton, “‘Boy or Girl?’ Parents Raising ‘Theybies’ Let Kids Decide,” *NBC News*, July 19, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/boy-or-girl-parents-raising-theybies-let-kids-decide-n891836>.

<sup>5</sup> Sean R. Atkinson and Darren Russell, “Gender Dysphoria,” *Australian Family Physician* 44, no. 11 (2015): 792-96.

species (i.e., ‘according to their kinds’ or ‘all kinds of’), but rather is designated by sexuality: male and female He created them.”<sup>6</sup> One should take note that by saying humans were designated by “sexuality,” Hamilton is using the term to directly connect biological sex and gender since that was how mankind was described. Animals were not described by their sex, so it must have been important to distinguish humanity as such. Some traditions, including some Jewish writings, have suggested that Adam, being the first human, had characteristics of both sexes.<sup>7</sup> However, such a notion does not fit with the reading of Genesis 1:27, which notes that “male and female He [God] created them.”<sup>8</sup> Hamilton argues, “To suggest that the primal being was an androgyne is to read into the text what is not there and to understand 1:27, ‘male and female created he them,’ as ‘male and female created he him (or it).’”<sup>9</sup> Further, there is no suggestion in Genesis or anywhere else in Scripture that the first person had characteristics of both sexes. There was no confusion in the creation design. There was a distinction between the sexes, and it was by God’s great and purposeful design. The male was different than the female, and the female was different than the male. Both were needed to procreate and fill the earth. Neither could fill the earth and subdue it without the other.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of creation, there was no society or culture to influence the created human beings. Therefore, gender must have only been based upon biological sex. In the Genesis 2 account of mankind’s creation, Adam first saw Eve and recognized that

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<sup>6</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 138.

<sup>7</sup> While Mathews does not hold to this view, he shows that such a view is still in existence in contemporary thought. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 231. Nadia Boltz-Weber also takes this view. She argues, “All human beings are made in the male and female (not male or female) image and likeness of God.” Nadia Boltz-Weber, *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation* (New York: Convergent, 2019), 45.

<sup>8</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 178.

<sup>10</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God’s Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 30.

something was different and unique about her. Adam had been charged with identifying and naming the animals of the earth (Gen 2:19-20). When the author of Genesis says that “there was not found a helper fit for him,” he is noting that among the animals there was nothing like Adam. So, the Lord created a helper “taken from the man” (Gen 2:22). When Adam saw her, he said, “she shall be called Woman” (Gen 2:23). When the woman appeared, “Eve is of the very stuff of Adam and yet a wholly new being.”<sup>11</sup> This recognition caused him to call her “woman” in response to seeing the distinct physiological differences. He did not call her “man.” He did not mistake her for being identical to himself. Physiological differences were obvious and cannot be ignored in the creation narrative. The physical differences between men and women are clear for one to observe even today, just as Adam and Eve observed of each other on that first encounter.

Distinctions were also given between man and woman that are not observed visually. While each one is equal in being fully human, in having intrinsic value, and in reflecting God’s image, each had differing roles. The woman is the answer to Adam’s search for a “helper” (Gen 2:20). A helper is a specific role, meaning that she would give “help” in the sense of aid and support.<sup>12</sup> By pointing to the woman’s source being the man, the author of Genesis is “suggesting that the man is the leader.”<sup>13</sup> The man is never called the woman’s helper in Scripture. This does not mean that a husband is not supposed to serve his wife (since Eph 5:25 calls the husband to give himself up for his wife just as Jesus did for His church). Rather, it shows the distinct role of leadership that belongs to the husband in a marriage relationship. This leadership role was not cultural or a result of the fall of humanity since the role was established by God for Adam before sin entered

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<sup>11</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1967), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 214.

<sup>13</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 221.

into the world.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Andreas Köstenberger notes, “The man was exercising dominion prior to the creation of the woman.”<sup>15</sup> While some people may downplay the Genesis narrative by contending that Jesus liberated women from this structure, John Piper and Wayne Grudem ask, “But where does Jesus say or do anything that criticizes the order of creation in which men bear a primary responsibility to lead, protect, and sustain? Nothing He did calls this good order into question.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus may be quoted in Scripture having explicitly answered the question about male headship, but He did not overturn the pattern in Genesis that was designed by God and intended for humanity.

The Genesis 1–2 narrative not only gives the distinctions between male and female, but should also point the reader to purposes behind those distinctions. Owen Strachan observes that the differences cannot be arbitrary in Scripture; they were “clearly and evocatively presented for our instruction.”<sup>17</sup> One of those primary purposes of the distinction is procreation, which is immediately mentioned following the creation of man and woman in chapter 1. They are told by God to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). Adam could not multiply on his own. Kevin DeYoung notes that this is one of the reasons why it was not good for man to be alone, since “by himself he could not reflect the Creator’s creative designs for the world.”<sup>18</sup> His helper was needed to complete the task of procreation. In fact, the woman’s part of the process is very important, as she carries the child and gives birth. There are many references to women in the Bible giving birth (Gen 4:1; 21:2; Ruth 4:13; 2 Sam 12:24; Luke 2:7). It is never a man who gives birth. Again,

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<sup>14</sup> Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning Of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 167.

<sup>15</sup> Köstenberger, *God’s Design for Man and Woman*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions about Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 1992), 26-27.

<sup>17</sup> Owen Strachan, “Transition or Transformation,” in *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 60.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 28.

this example would be purely physiological, not based on society. No society determined if the male or female would be the one to give birth. This also demonstrates the different roles between the man and woman in procreation. See also the context of the Genesis 2 creation of woman. Immediately following is the mandate that a man should leave his parents and “hold fast to his wife” (Gen 2:24). This gives another purpose for the distinction. There is an intentional design for relationship between a man and woman, which makes them husband and wife. It is a unique relationship not seen among the other creatures of the earth. Mark Yarhouse helpfully notes, “To be human is also to experience a longing for completion. Did God create us with a longing for completion that forces us to look outside of ourselves so that the longing itself would be illustrative?”<sup>19</sup> He goes on to say that it is perhaps the differences in male and female and the longing for one another that is meant to represent longing for God. Readers must be careful not to go too far with this illustration, believing that a spouse can complete an individual. Christopher Yuan adds, “If the sole function of marriage is to fulfill our human need for companionship, this elevates individual needs above everything else.”<sup>20</sup> Christopher Ash echoes this in saying that such a “couple focused marriage” is idolatrous: “When the relationship of the couple is considered as an end in itself it becomes an idol, and idols are empty nothings whose worshippers become like them.”<sup>21</sup> What some may believe completes them ends up destroying them. Nadia Boltz-Weber takes the opposite stance of those who see marriage as completion, but also takes a dangerous turn as she argues for individualism and chastises churches who teach that Eve was grateful for that helper role. Boltz-Weber writes, “[Eve] was only ever an ‘us,’ never once an ‘I.’ God gave her to

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<sup>19</sup> Mark A. Yarhouse and Christian Association for Psychological Studies, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies Books (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 37.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2018), 79.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2005), chap. 7, Kindle.

Adam, like a mail-order bride. Adam was her purpose.”<sup>22</sup> Such a view misses the point. Marriage is not a need, nor is it intended to make one human being to be another human being’s sole purpose for living. Marriage is God’s design to point to a greater relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:32). By giving purpose for the gender distinctions, God shows that the differences are intentional, not accidental.

Today there are suggestions that not only is gender a social construct, but that gender can be different from the biological sex, or even fluid. Gender fluidity relates to “a person whose gender identity is not fixed.”<sup>23</sup> There are no such indications in the creation story or the entire Bible that a person can change from one gender to another. Gender fluidity is based on how a person feels—whether he or she feels like they are a different gender than the one assigned at birth (which would be based on biological sex). The logical difficulty is that a person cannot prove they are a different gender based upon how they feel. No scientific observation can ever observe such a notion; it is purely subjective. From a biblical perspective, feelings or emotions can help evaluate what is going on in the heart, but should not be something on which a person bases their trust (especially in something so foundational as gender identity).

Opponents of the binary understanding of gender often point to the rare example of an intersex person (one who is born with conditions that do not fit the typical male or female categories).<sup>24</sup> This can cause confusion among Christians since the condition is not presented in Scripture.<sup>25</sup> Christians must be cautious because these rare cases are not

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<sup>22</sup> Boltz-Weber, *Shameless*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Merriam-Webster.com, “Gender Fluid,” accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender-fluid>.

<sup>24</sup> Megan K. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 23.

<sup>25</sup> Statistics regarding intersex at birth are varying, particularly because there are many different definitions as to what is considered intersex. According to the Intersex Society of North America, some medical stats show that one out of every 1,500 or 2,000 persons may be considered intersex, but there are other conditions that they do not believe have been considered in this statistic. So, they believe the number

only highlighted, but also used to bolster theories such as that there can be an “intersex condition of the brain.”<sup>26</sup> Rosaria Butterfield rightly cautions Christians that “sexuality can be fallen in both natural and moral ways.”<sup>27</sup> The physical condition of intersex would be a natural result of the fall, since those who are born with a physical mutation did not cause such a condition. Intersex cases seem to present a challenge to the biblical definition of gender being only male or female. The Bible does not seem to give any indication validating the existence of a non-binary gender condition. The only exception could be the “eunuchs from birth” mentioned in Matthew 19:12. Such eunuchs are believed by some to be intersex. Denny Burk, however, notes that those eunuchs were castrated males who were not sexless but lacked the ability to procreate.<sup>28</sup> The biblical view of gender, therefore, does not mention a person who is not male or female. Regarding intersex, Christians should be careful of viewing gender on a non-binary spectrum. Burk writes,

Even when external genitalia are ambiguous, there is an underlying dimorphism encoded in our cells. Even when abnormalities occur in chromosomes, they still comprise some combination of Xs and Ys. The reproductive possibilities for intersex persons seem to align with the chromosomes. Male reproductive capacity comes only from those who have Y chromosomes. Female reproductive capacity comes only from those who have no Y chromosome.<sup>29</sup>

The biological sex of such a person may be distorted, but that does not mean that there is not a binary option of male or female. There is a tendency at the present time to make gender more complicated. Rather than focusing on what may be true, the world looks for what is unclear in order to question the biblical creation narrative. Christians

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should be much higher. Intersex Society of North America, “How Common Is Intersex?,” accessed on February 28, 2018, <http://www.isna.org/faq/frequency>.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky, “The Complexities of Gender Identity,” in Beilby and Eddy, *Understanding Transgender Identities*, 112.

<sup>27</sup> Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2015), 113, Kindle.

<sup>28</sup> Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?*, 178.

<sup>29</sup> Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?*, 180.

should be careful not to drift into the mindset of the world, which thinks Scripture is not sufficient to speak into difficult issues of the day.

One additional item regarding gender found in Scripture is important to note. Throughout the entirety of Scripture, people are described as male or female. There is never any question, nor is there any suggestion that their society or one's feelings determined whether a person was male or female. Jesus too reiterated the Genesis account in Mark 10:6, showing that He affirmed the creation of male and female as true and good. Although there are differences, the author of Genesis shows that both male and female are created in God's image (Gen 1:27). Sharon James writes, "The creation account shows us that binary is not bad; it is beautiful. When God separated light from darkness, land from sea, and earth from sky, He was bringing order out of chaos."<sup>30</sup> Certainly, God also brings order in His beautiful and good design for humanity. Genesis 1:31 reminds the reader that "God saw everything He had made, and behold, it was very good." Even the distinction between male and female was very good. It was not a result of the fall, the entrance of sin into the world.<sup>31</sup> When the male and female distinction is treated as irrelevant or even harmful, one rejects the truth spelled out in Genesis 1:31 that God's design was "very good."

### **Sexuality in the Beginning (Gen 1-2)**

Like gender, sexuality was designed by God from the beginning of creation. Sex was not an accident. God was not surprised when Adam and Eve discovered this act. It was created by design and by God for a purpose. Sex is not a distortion of God's purposes resulting from the fall, but because of the fall it can be misused and distorted. The mandate in Genesis 1:28 to "be fruitful and multiply" demonstrates this truth. Before

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<sup>30</sup> Sharon James, *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need To Know?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019), 59.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and The Trinity," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 162.

sin came into the world, sex was already in existence as the way to fill the earth with God's image bearers. Malachi 2:15 speaks of marriage and the intended purpose of "godly offspring." While the context of that passage is condemning divorce in Israel, the principle shows that procreation is intended to multiply God's image bearers. In the context of Genesis 1, to "multiply" means to procreate. Besides sex, there is no other way to multiply, unless one is speaking of spiritual multiplication (making disciples).

While one of the purposes of sex is multiplication, some have made the mistake of reducing sex to solely being for procreation. Many in the early church, such as Augustine, are often said to have held this belief.<sup>32</sup> Even the official teaching of the Catholic church has been that sex is primarily for procreation.<sup>33</sup> The Genesis creation account does not speak of the pleasure of sex, but it also does not minimize sex to only functionality. Kenneth Mathews gives the reminder that both extreme approaches to sex (primarily procreation or pleasure) miss something else entirely: "Human procreation is not intended merely as a mechanism for replication or the expression of human passion but is instrumental in experiencing covenant blessing."<sup>34</sup> So, if procreation was necessary to experience the covenant blessing, then it would not be possible to experience the covenant blessing through a homosexual relationship. This shows that there is so much more to sex and marriage than people often recognize. For the people of God, sex is a gift from Him. It is a blessing in itself, as well as in what it produces (children). Sex also finds its purpose in the one flesh union (Gen 2:24). Adam and Eve's one flesh union was, as Sam Allberry writes, "something of a re-union, joining together what had originally

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<sup>32</sup> David F. Kelly, "Sexuality and Concupiscence in Augustine," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 3 (1983): 98.

<sup>33</sup> Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Liguori, 1994), 412.

<sup>34</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 174.

been one” since Eve was taken from Adam’s ribs (Gen 2:21).<sup>35</sup> Allberry goes on to emphasize that human marriage is intended to reflect an aspect of God’s nature, specifically that “the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4). No other relationship besides a married man and woman can have a union that reflects the union of the Trinity in the same way. However, marriage is also intended to reflect the relationship between Christ and His church (Eph 5:22-33). Strachan emphasizes, “A man and a man cannot marry in the sight of God; this means there are two ‘heads.’ A woman and a woman cannot marry in the sight of God; this means there is no ‘head.’ No other form of union images the Christ-church relationship.”<sup>36</sup> Yuan makes the argument that the phrase “fit for him” in Genesis 2:18 means “similar and dissimilar.”<sup>37</sup> He says that something too similar would have been incest, while too dissimilar would have been bestiality. God’s design of man and woman is the perfect fit.

One must also remember who has given the blessing of sex. Too often, an individual’s understanding of sex leaves the Creator God out of the equation. The Creator must be considered because the Creator is the one who can show the intention or meaning behind His creation. An artist could paint a picture that is completely misinterpreted, but if the artist explains the meaning and purpose of his painting, then it cannot be simply redefined by someone else. Sex should ultimately be defined by God and is intended to glorify Him.

Very early on in the Bible, God gives specific laws regarding sexuality: Exodus 20:14 forbids adultery; Leviticus 18:7-17 forbids uncovering the nakedness of relatives; Leviticus 18:22 forbids homosexuality; and Leviticus 18:23 forbids bestiality. While people may view these laws as restrictive, they point to sex glorifying God. They show how humanity should be holy since God is holy (Lev 11:44). In addition, His laws reveal

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<sup>35</sup> Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction*, Questions Christians Ask (Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2013), 20-21.

<sup>36</sup> Strachan, “Transition or Transformation,” 72.

<sup>37</sup> Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 84-85.

what is holy regarding sexuality. While some may argue today that anything can be holy, or may try to redefine holiness to allow for more sexual permissiveness, God’s laws make clear that He cares how humanity lives.<sup>38</sup> God points humanity to true holiness that pleases Him.

### **Distorting Gender and Sexuality (Gen 3)**

While God’s creation was considered very good, sin soon came into the world and disrupted the good creation. Paul Tripp says, “One of the saddest moments in Scripture is found in Genesis 3. For the very first time, you find Adam and Eve hiding in fear from their Creator. Designed for lifelong and life-shaping communion with Him, they are now afraid to face Him.”<sup>39</sup> Genesis 3 tells the story of the fall of humanity, which began with Eve and then Adam, when they ate from the tree which God had forbidden them to eat. Their disobedience demonstrated that they desired more than God had offered to them. They desired to elevate themselves to be like God. The entrance of sin into the garden affected every aspect of life, including their view of gender and sexuality. The sin nature that has been passed down through the generations from the first humans continues to impact humanity still today (Rom 5:12).

The change happened immediately after the first sin in the garden. The Lord described the curse that would follow the sin, telling Eve, “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). While the ESV translation uses the phrase “contrary to,” other translations (such as NIV, NASB, and CSB) read “for,” which reads, “Your desire shall be for your husband.” Either way, the passage is significant because it shows that, as a result of the fall, the woman will desire to take the place of her husband. She would not want to submit to his leadership and would desire to take control.

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<sup>38</sup> Boltz-Weber, for example, redefines holiness as “the union we experience with one another and with God,” even wanting the reader to understand a story about a same-sex hookup and all-night storytelling as a “holy” encounter. Boltz-Weber, *Shameless*, 19, 158.

<sup>39</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Sex in a Broken World: How Christ Redeems What Sin Distorts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 158.

At the same time, her husband would not allow her to take the leadership role. He might even be sinful in his harshness to take back his leadership in the relationship. Hamilton writes, “The relationship now becomes a fierce dispute, with each party trying to rule the other.”<sup>40</sup> That desire would lead to constant strife in marital relationships from that point forward, and the view of gender roles would be distorted for generations to come. Ortlund writes, “While many women today need release from male domination, the liberating alternative is not female rivalry or autonomy but male headship wedded to female help. Christian redemption does not redefine creation; it restores creation, so that wives learn godly submission and husbands learn godly headship.”<sup>41</sup> This strife in marriage and attempt to redefine gender roles would be one way that all of humanity would see the disastrous results of the fall.

In examining how this disaster happened, it becomes clear from Genesis 3 that the distortion occurred when the serpent first challenged humanity’s view of God. When the serpent was tempting Eve, he asked, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). The serpent first tried to get humanity to question if God really said what they thought He said. This is brought into question in modern times by questioning important doctrines such as the divine inspiration of Scripture.<sup>42</sup> Scholars who seek to dismiss what is said in the Bible have sought to discredit the authority of the Bible itself as the Word of God.<sup>43</sup> Matthew Vines, on the other hand, claims to affirm the

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<sup>40</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 202.

<sup>41</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 137-38.

<sup>42</sup> A. W. Pink writes, “Every effort that is being made to deny the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, every attempt put forward to set aside their absolute authority, every attack on the Bible which we now witness in the name of scholarship, is only a repetition of this ancient question, ‘Yea, *hath* God said?’” A. W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: Moody, 1922), 36.

<sup>43</sup> Bart Ehrman, a professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, is one such example of someone who has aggressively sought to discredit the Bible. He has even appropriately titled one of his books *Misquoting Jesus*, in he argues that the modern person cannot know what Jesus actually said since no one is in possession of the original documents of the Bible. The idea is that modern

authority of Scripture, yet questions whether God really said that *all* homosexual relationships are an abomination. He dismisses the plain reading of the texts that condemn homosexuality, while concluding that it is only those that are lustful in “excess” who God has condemned.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, this idea of questioning what God said is not a new idea since it goes all the way back to the temptation in the garden of Eden, but it is also important in the current discussion of gender and sexuality. If opponents of the Christian belief can discredit the Bible (or at least the way it has been interpreted for two thousand years), then perhaps it proves that God did not actually say what is written, and thus modern thought takes the seat of authority.

The serpent tempter in Genesis 3 was not only questioning *if* God said something, but also God’s wisdom and intent. Mathews claims that the serpent was aiming at questioning God’s motivation.<sup>45</sup> The serpent’s desire was to get the man and woman to doubt God and to think that they knew better than Him since God’s intent was not good for them. Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds of the truth that “the secret things belong to the Lord our God,” but people still feel that they have the right to question God and His motivation. Much like the serpent’s challenge, many churches and denominations are questioning if God really said that homosexuality is a sin.<sup>46</sup> Although it is plain in Scripture that homosexuality is unrighteousness (1 Cor 6:9), such questioning is similar to this first temptation in the garden. Many churches are also questioning if God really designed

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translations of Scripture surely cannot contain the actual words of God, and therefore one cannot trust the Bible’s accuracy. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 11.

<sup>44</sup> Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014), 105.

<sup>45</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 235.

<sup>46</sup> The Episcopal Church in America changed their stance on homosexuality in 1994. The United Church of Christ and Evangelical Lutheran Church of America opened the door to gay marriage in their congregations in 2005 and 2009 respectively, while the Presbyterian Church (USA) changed their position on gay marriage in 2015. Nolan Feeney, “2 Other Christians Denominations That Allow Gay Marriage,” *Time*, March 18, 2015, <https://time.com/3749253/churches-gay-marriage/>.

gender roles which place men as leaders in the household and the church (1 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:11-14).<sup>47</sup> They are deciding that what God has said about this matter does not apply to modern times.

Not only did the serpent convince Adam and Eve to question what God had said and to question God's wisdom, but the serpent next distorted what God had said to man. The serpent asked, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" An examination of God's command in Genesis 2:16-17 reveals that God did not forbid eating from "*any* tree," but rather, He mentioned one specific tree. In fact, God told the man he could "surely eat of *every* tree of the garden," except "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" he should not eat (Gen 2:16-17). Mathews notes that the serpent also cleverly omitted the word "freely" (NASB) from God's instruction, which again distorts God's motivation.<sup>48</sup> Whereas God's instruction had emphasized Adam and Eve's freedom of choice, the enemy changed it to emphasize what they could *not* do. Likewise, God never said that all sex is forbidden, or that certain individuals must live without sex. God did say that there are boundaries in which sex should be done. God has prohibited fornication for the unmarried teenager, just as He has prohibited same-sex intercourse. But He has also given the opportunity for marriage between a man and woman, as it was originally designed.

If the serpent could not get the man and woman to question whether something was said by God and could not trick them with distorting the truth, then he would attempt to get them to doubt that God was telling the truth. This bold attempt is evident by the serpent's statement, "You will surely not die" (Gen 3:4). God did say in Genesis 2:17 that death would be a consequence of disobedience. The suggestion that God was not telling the

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<sup>47</sup> A Pew Research article focuses on the ordination of women, but the debate is much broader when it comes to whether women are permitted to fulfill the preaching role. David Masci, "The Divide Over Ordaining Women," Pew Research Center, September 9, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/09/the-divide-over-ordaining-women/>.

<sup>48</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 235.

whole truth is to call God a liar. The serpent does not openly say that God is lying, as that would be too obviously false, but his claim insinuates that God is “selfish and deceptive.”<sup>49</sup> Today, humanity is still tempted to ignore the warnings and downplay the consequences of sexual sin.<sup>50</sup> They clearly do not see their behavior having negative consequences but believe it will have a positive outcome. This is similar to the serpent’s lie. Hamilton writes, “So says the snake—disobedience will bring positive blessings. Consumption of the forbidden fruit will make the woman godlike, knowing good and evil. Her eyes (and the man’s eyes) will be opened.”<sup>51</sup>

Lastly, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve by putting the thought in their minds that God was withholding something good from them. He said, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). A. W. Pink writes regarding this passage that “the Devil here suggests, that God was despotically withholding from man something which would be advantageous to him.”<sup>52</sup> This temptation again calls God’s character into question, but this time the serpent questions God’s goodness.<sup>53</sup> Today, the notion is presented that by not permitting women to lead in the home or church, God is withholding something good from them. Similarly,

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<sup>49</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 236.

<sup>50</sup> For example, countless unmarried couples deliberately cohabit. A recent Pew Research poll showed that 78 percent of young adults (age 18-29) believe it is acceptable for an unmarried couple to live together, and 59 percent of adults (age 18-44) say that they have cohabitated at some point. Pew Research, “Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.,” Pew Internet & American Life Project, November 6, 2019, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/11/06/marriage-and-cohabitation-in-the-u-s/>. Another Pew Research poll showed an even more disturbing trend because it focused on the beliefs of professing Christians. The poll concluded that 46 percent of evangelical Protestants believe “sex between unmarried adults who are in a committed relationship” is “sometimes or always acceptable.” The percentage increases to a majority 57 percent when all professing Christian groups are included. Pew Research, “Half of U.S. Christians Say Casual Sex between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable,” Pew Internet & American Life Project, August 31, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable/>.

<sup>51</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 189.

<sup>52</sup> Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Köstenberger, *God’s Design for Man and Woman*, 42.

some people believe the lie that God is withholding something good from men or women who are attracted to the same sex. The lie that God is withholding something good from people not only speaks against His goodness, but it also implies that humanity is inherently good. Ironically, mankind tries to put himself in the place of judge over God, believing that they truly know good and evil. The problem is that the one who believes this would be trusting in something or someone other than God to supply those blessings. This is what the serpent wanted. All these ways that the serpent tempted the first couple were ultimately done to distort their view of God. When God's character is attacked, what obviously follows is an attack on all that He has designed. It was important for the serpent to call into question God's wisdom, goodness, and truthfulness. After that, the gender roles set in place by God would be questioned and the act of sex would be distorted from its intended purpose. Mark Achtemeier, who changed his beliefs on same-sex marriage, writes about his changing beliefs about God. When thinking about how a same-sex attracted person would be forced into "a life of celibacy," he questioned, "What kind of God would put people, through no fault of their own, in a situation where the only spiritual options available to them were broken alienation from God or divine condemnation?"<sup>54</sup> He believed that such people would have to feel alienated from God as they struggle through life, or they would give in to their same-sex desires and be condemned. Such a belief is an attack on the very character of God, who is loving, gracious, and good. When a person goes down the road of attacking God's character, the distortion of His design surely follows.

By believing the lies of the serpent in the garden, sin entered humanity. The effect was immediate. Guilt and shame were felt by both Adam and Eve as they recognized their nakedness (Gen 3:7). When a person falls into sin, it leads to guilt and shame. Sin looked promising at first for the first humans, but sin never shows the ending upfront.

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<sup>54</sup> Mark Achtemeier, *The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical's Change of Heart* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 13.

Garrett Kell writes, “Satan doesn’t tell you sin’s true cost, because the cost is too high.”<sup>55</sup> Sin is seen as desirable, even a delight to the eyes (Gen 3:6). Humanity fails to see the ending, the consequences that follow the sin. Adam and Eve found themselves naked and ashamed. This instance is regarded by some as a “sexual awakening.”<sup>56</sup> If that means that sex only happened after the fall, that terminology would not be true. But there may be another sense in which there was a sexual awakening: sin brought in deviant ways to distort this God-given gift. However, the distortion of sex would not stop there. It was merely the beginning of a downward spiral. What can be seen from Genesis 3 is that the first humans desired more than God had given them. They took the bait from the serpent and questioned God’s words, His wisdom, and His goodness. The result was a curse that affected all human life, including gender and sexuality.

### **Continuing Distortion (Rom 1)**

In the apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans, he shows how the same lies that were believed in the garden are believed by people in modern times. Once again it begins with what people believe about God. He says that they “suppress the truth” (1:18). They have access to the truth, but they do not want to hear it. Robert Mounce writes, “Truth cannot be changed, but it can be held down or stifled.”<sup>57</sup> Unable to change truth, people choose to ignore that God exists, despite His revealing of Himself through creation and through the Scriptures. Like the temptation that faced the first man and woman, Paul demonstrates how humanity begins to believe that they are most wise: “Claiming to be wise, they

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<sup>55</sup> J. Garrett Kell, *Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the Promises of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 73.

<sup>56</sup> Kidner believes that the context is instead emphasizing the prohibition, but he notes that the knowledge of good and evil “has often been regarded as a sexual awakening, in light of Gen 3:7.” Kidner, *Genesis*, 68. Jewish scholar Andrew Weitzman refers to this “sexual awakening” view appearing in Jewish tradition. Andrew Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>57</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 77.

became fools” (1:22). They create idols of themselves. Richard Lints says, “Idols represent the inversion of the original theological order of representation and reflection. The idols depict an exchange of the glory of God for the foolishness of this world (Rom 1:23).”<sup>58</sup> So, the idea gets lost that mankind was made in the image of God to reflect Him and be His representatives on the earth. This is demonstrated in modern times by people who claim they are wiser than those in the past who did not have the knowledge about a person’s innate sexuality that science and human progress has supposedly enabled today. One such example is Achtemeier, who writes, “Lacking any concept of sexual orientation, the only category available to Paul’s audience for understanding same-sex activity is to view it as the product of out-of-control lust.”<sup>59</sup> The implication is that modern people know more about sexuality than ancient people like Paul. Unable to effectively change the truth, they suppress it.

One thing is noticeably absent from the Romans 1 passage when comparing it with Genesis 3. No serpent is mentioned. Paul makes it clear that what is described in Romans 1 is what humanity desires. The human heart is blamed; there is no room for blame-shifting to “the devil made me do it.” The choices within Romans 1 fall on humanity. Lints writes, “They exchanged the truth for a lie. It was an inherently irrational exchange, and this is exactly why the reversing of the exchange is not primarily an intellectual matter. Redeeming what was corrupted centered on matters of the heart.”<sup>60</sup> Because of not believing God’s truth, “God gave them up to dishonorable passions” (1:26). He gave them what they wanted without intervening. The end of Romans 1 shows where those passions led. They led to people rejecting God’s original design for sexuality, straying away into homosexuality (Rom 1:27).

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 36 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 103.

<sup>59</sup> Achtemeier, *The Bible’s Yes to Same-Sex Marriage*, 92-93.

<sup>60</sup> Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 110.

However, it must be noted that homosexuality is not listed as the worst of sinfulness. As those who are described in Romans 1 continued to refuse to acknowledge God, the downward spiral continued deeper into sin. Paul writes, “They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (1:29-31).

The bottom of the spiral ends with humanity not only committing the above-mentioned sins, but also giving approval to those who practice such sins (1:32). Mounce explains, “Willful rejection of divine revelation hardens the heart to the point where the rebel takes delight in the sinfulness of others. At this point wickedness has sunk to its lowest level.”<sup>61</sup> Butterfield writes, “Our tendency is to find others who sin just like we do, so that we won’t be alone. We search for role models, so that we might minimize the sinfulness of our sin. We enlist others to help us in calling our sin a sanctifying grace.”<sup>62</sup>

A common thread runs through the Genesis 3 story and Romans 1 account. The sinfulness of humanity is obvious in both accounts. One common thread is idolatry. The pride of humanity is a form of idolatry because it is self-worship rather than the worship of God. Pride is how the serpent enticed Eve, saying, “You will be like God” (Gen 3:5). Pride is what would drive a person to suppress the truth of God (Rom 1:18) and become “God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful,” which John Stott said are highlighted as four different forms of pride.<sup>63</sup> A prideful heart distorts not only one’s own view of God and worship of God, but even a person’s view of self and what is good for self. Stott insists, “Our fallen human nature is incurably self-centered, and pride is the elemental

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<sup>61</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, 86.

<sup>62</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 120.

<sup>63</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 48.

human sin, whether the form it takes is self-importance, self-confidence, self-assertion, or self-righteousness.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Thomas Schreiner writes, “Failing to glorify God is the root sin” in Romans 1.<sup>65</sup> That chapter emphasizes this root, showing that man “exchanged the glory of the immortal God” for other things (1:23). When God’s glory is not preeminent, self becomes the natural idol to take God’s place. When Paul talks about idolatry in Romans 1, it is because people have set themselves and those whom they desire as idols in their hearts. Schreiner states, “The fundamental sin of both Gentiles and Jews was idolatry.”<sup>66</sup> It is the same problem today, as people put their sexual desires and feelings regarding gender roles as ultimate. Self has become the idol, and the worship of self is most certainly pride. These issues have plagued humanity for thousands of years. What is evident from these passages of Scripture is the depravity of mankind.

### **Redeeming Gender and Sexuality**

If a person were to only read Genesis 1–3 and Romans 1, the condition would look dire. One would wonder if there is any hope at all. It is necessary for all people to understand the fall of humanity to be able to see the magnificence of what Jesus Christ has accomplished. When sinners recognize the depth of their sin, and how far short of God’s standard of righteousness that they fall, then the cross is magnified.<sup>67</sup> If pride is the cause of distorting human gender and sexuality, then Romans 3 illustrates how Jesus Christ has eliminated any reason for a person to be prideful.

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<sup>64</sup> Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 88.

<sup>66</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 187.

<sup>67</sup> There is an excellent illustration in *The Gospel-Centered Life*, showing that the more a person sees God’s holiness and their own personal sinfulness over time, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is understood better than the day when they first repented and believed the gospel. Robert H. Thune and Will Walker, *The Gospel-Centered Life: Study Guide with Leader’s Notes* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2011), 13.

The apostle Paul wrote that the law is there for humanity “so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Rom 3:19). While Romans 1 speaks of human boasting in sin, Romans 3 shows that there is no room for boasting. Mankind is not accountable to himself, but to God. Mounce notes that “the law makes a person conscious of sin” and even “encourages effort,” knowing that no human effort can reach God’s standard.<sup>68</sup> Those who have suppressed the truth (as seen in Rom 1) are confronted with their rebellion against God when they read or hear the law of God. The initial human instincts generally would not consider this confrontation to be good. To be confronted with the truth certainly is not comfortable, but it is best for a person living in rebellion to the truth.

When the apostle Paul says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), Mounce draws the connection to creation, saying that “the original intention was that people reflect the glory of God.”<sup>69</sup> But a sinful person cannot reflect God’s glory. Douglas Moo writes, “‘Glory’ in the Bible characteristically refers to the magnificent presence of the Lord, and the eternal state was often pictured as a time when God’s people would experience and have a part in that ‘glory.’”<sup>70</sup> Since it is impossible for humanity with a sin nature to perfectly obey God’s law and be justified in His sight, or to even stand in His presence, it was necessary for God to intervene if mankind was not going to fall into complete destruction. Regarding Adam’s loss of glory, Schreiner points out, “That which has been lost through Adam is being restored in Christ.”<sup>71</sup> The glory is not lost forever. Mankind will one day perfectly reflect God once again as He

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<sup>68</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, 111.

<sup>69</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, 115.

<sup>70</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 226.

<sup>71</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 114.

originally intended. Man will one day be able to stand before the Lord as righteous, not a sinful being, because of what Christ has done.

Regarding Romans 3:21, Mounce states, “The righteousness God provides has its origin in what God did, not what people may accomplish.”<sup>72</sup> This is good news since mankind is incapable of accomplishing their own redemption and salvation. When Jesus Christ took on flesh and dwelt with humanity, He did what no one else could do: He obeyed the law perfectly. He fulfilled the perfect role of a man and did not falter into sexual sin, as every other man has done.

In Romans 3, the apostle Paul points toward the forgiveness of sin in Christ. Verse 25 is a key thought, saying that Jesus was “put forward as a propitiation by His blood.” Scholars argue about the precise meaning of the word *propitiation*, and whether it means “an appeasing of wrath” or “a covering of sin.”<sup>73</sup> Either interpretation lends itself toward the understanding that those who trust in Jesus have received the forgiveness of sin. Without that forgiveness, a person is constantly bearing the weight of their own guilt and shame and awaits the coming wrath and judgment of God. With forgiveness, however, that guilt and shame are removed and are replaced with hope.

Not only did Jesus fulfill the law perfectly and forgive sins, but He offers sinners “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Rom 3:22). There is good news for all who trust in Christ. There is hope for the previously hopeless. Even though Christ has forgiven those who trust in Him, one may wonder how that gives hope for the future. A person who now recognizes that they have been living in sin, perhaps engaging in sexual behavior outside of marriage, needs to know that they do not have to remain in that sin. They need to know that they can avoid falling when the temptation comes again. Jesus has brought hope for the future, giving believers the power to say “no” to sin. The sexually broken no longer are bound to continue in sin. The husband and wife

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<sup>72</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, 114.

<sup>73</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, 116-17.

are no longer destined to be in conflict over their roles. There is good news for all who will believe because Jesus is their righteousness.

Mounce notes, “The redemption provided by Christ enables us to be brought back into a personal relationship with God.”<sup>74</sup> The relationship with God was broken in the garden because of sin. With a restored relationship to God through faith in Christ, a person desires to please God over themselves. That desire affects all areas of life, even gender roles and sexuality. The curse from Genesis 3:16, when God said the woman’s desire would be contrary to her husband, would be a part of that change. As she is sanctified, her desires change. Likewise, the man’s desire to rule over his wife instead of leading her will change. His desire will be to honor her and be understanding toward her, since she too is a fellow heir (1 Pet 3:7). He will love her as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25). And ultimately, they will glorify God.

### **Conclusion**

If one is to have a true understanding of gender and sexuality, the Bible must be the foundation. Apart from Scripture, humans have the tendency to rely on how they feel. There is no solid basis for truth. Scripture helps everyone see the original design for humanity through creation. It also shows the distortion through the fall of humanity. But humanity is not left in sin. Redemption can be found in Jesus Christ. These truths help to make sense of gender and sexuality in a way that not only protects the person, but more importantly brings glory to God.

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<sup>74</sup> Mounce, *Romans*, 115.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED  
TO COUNSELING STUDENTS ON  
GENDER AND SEXUALITY

This chapter will focus on several foundational issues related to gender and sexuality. College students, like other adults, are not just seeking how they should live. They are looking for the purpose behind it in order to be convinced that the “how” is not outdated or mere tradition. The initial section will help to explain the purpose of gender and sex. Next, it is important to include a discussion of the origin of one’s identity and how it can be improperly constructed by feelings and desires. This chapter will then look at a few specific issues (namely, homosexuality or same-sex attraction, and transgenderism) to discuss how the Bible is sufficient to counsel people who are dealing with those issues. Lastly, a basic method for counseling students on any issue of gender or sexuality will be proposed.

**The Purpose of Gender**

The issue of gender roles and gender identity appear to be especially controversial and evolving in the public sphere. Gender is being separated from biological sex. Paul Eddy and James Beilby observe,

The 1950s and 60s brought new language and categories that forever transformed how people thought about sexuality and, eventually, gender identity. Most importantly, the ideas of sex and gender became increasingly distinguished. “Sex” refers to the biological/ physical characteristics that identify humans as male and female (i.e., chromosomes, sex hormones, gonads, genitals, etc.). “Gender,” on the other hand, refers both to one’s gender identity (i.e., one’s inner sense of being a man or woman, or what some referred to as one’s “psychological sex”) and to one’s

gender role / expression (i.e., the outward manifestation of one's gender identity, typically expressed in societal norms associated with masculinity or femininity).<sup>1</sup>

While college tends to be a time of self-discovery for many students, gender identity is becoming part of that exploration for some students. Students are developing convictions and beliefs about gender roles, which will impact their lives, both in the present time and their future.

Evolutionary theory cannot adequately explain the purpose of genders beyond reproduction since evolution does not have meaning. A greater challenge is presented when one embraces the idea of gender fluidity, where a person believes a human being shifts between masculine and feminine traits.<sup>2</sup> Beilby and Eddy note that the “germ of this idea” of non-binary humanity can be “traced back to Charles Darwin, who set the stage for a ‘new genderless human nature.’”<sup>3</sup> If it were true that a man could become a woman or that a woman could become a man, then biological sex and gender would have no meaning or purpose.

Gender was created by God with a purpose. When God created humans as male and female (Gen 1-2), it was not an accident. Companionship was certainly part of His creation.<sup>4</sup> However, it must have been more than companionship since a person may find that in someone of the same sex. There was a purpose in the distinction between the two humans. If there were no purpose, then God would have created them alike or asexual, but He did not. Each of the two genders were created to fill specific roles. While the first chapters of Genesis do not give extensive portrayals of those roles given to the male and to the female, it does set the stage for the rest of Scripture, which does give more specifics

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<sup>1</sup> James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, introduction to *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?* (Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2017), 167, Kindle.

<sup>3</sup> Beilby and Eddy, introduction to *Understanding Transgender Identities*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 27.

regarding gender roles. As Raymond Ortlund rightly points out, the New Testament instructions regarding gender roles must today be interpreted consistently with Genesis 1-3.<sup>5</sup>

The creation account conveys that God created man first, which demonstrates an order to His creation. Denny Burk writes that in the Old Testament “the firstborn would often have special authority over those born after him.”<sup>6</sup> When the woman appears, her role is clearly stated as the man’s “helper” (Gen 2:18). Her role was not given as a consequence of the fall but was given from the beginning, before sin entered the world.<sup>7</sup> The helper role was not to demean or lessen the value of the woman. Such a term is used in the New Testament for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26), who is the Christian’s helper. He is not less than the person whom He indwells. In fact, He is greater. Jesus Himself came to humanity as a servant (Phil 2:7). Gender roles can be seen in today’s American society as discriminatory, or even as oppressive to women.<sup>8</sup> Some have taken the God-given gender roles and exaggerated them to make them seem abusive. Beth Allison Barr takes the 1 Timothy 2:12 passage and expands it to mean that men would have general authority over women. She writes, “If men (simply because of their sex) have the potential to preach and exercise spiritual authority over a church congregation but women (simply

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<sup>5</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 119.

<sup>6</sup> Denny Burk, “5 Evidences of Complementarian Gender Roles in Genesis 1-2,” The Gospel Coalition, March 5, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-evidences-of-complementarian-gender-roles-in-genesis-1-2/>.

<sup>7</sup> The argument of roles being given in the beginning is important because some egalitarians, like Beth Allison Barr, have attempted to paint male headship not as divinely ordained order, but a result of human sin. Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021), 25.

<sup>8</sup> The view that gender roles are oppressive can even be seen in the church. Alice Mathews makes the argument that the complementarian interpretation of the Bible produces a gender-based hierarchy, and that Jesus opposed and came to overturn “all oppressive hierarchies.” Alice Mathews, *Gender Roles and the People of God: Rethinking What We Were Taught about Men and Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 69-70.

because of their sex) do not, then that gives men ‘in general’ authority over women ‘in general.’”<sup>9</sup> This is a faulty conclusion since the Bible never gives all men authority over all women.

Even when the gender roles are limited to marriage, the call for wives to submit to their husbands is still controversial. While many in the modern day see submission as demeaning and negative, God does not see it as such. The ultimate example of the goodness of godly submission is found in Jesus Christ Himself (John 5:19). If submission was evil, then Jesus most certainly would not have been submissive.<sup>10</sup> The submission of a wife to her husband is seen as oppressive when the husband is not truly fulfilling his own God-given role to love his wife as Christ loves the church (Eph 5:25). Admittedly, too many men in the church are not loving their wives yet demand submission. Submission should not be demanded but should happen as both the husband and wife yield their lives to God and His Word.

It is also important to note that many in the world insist that “personal role and personal worth must go together, so that a limitation in role reduces or threatens personal worth.”<sup>11</sup> This mentality, as Ortlund points out, loses confidence in the gospel.<sup>12</sup> A woman, for example, who refuses to submit to her husband may feel like it takes away her worth. In such instances, it is possible that she has forgotten that her worth is in Christ alone. A biblical counselor should help her recognize that through passages of Scripture such as Matthew 10:29-31, where Jesus says we are valued by God. Likewise, John 1:12 speaks of God’s adoption, making us His children, which displays our worth in Him.

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<sup>9</sup> Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> There is a debate as to whether Jesus eternally submits to the Father. Some believe His submission was voluntary and only while on earth prior to the cross. Mathews holds to this understanding as she notes at the beginning of her book that roles “come and go.” Mathews, *Gender Roles and the People of God*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Ortlund, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” 141.

<sup>12</sup> Ortlund, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” 141.

Critics of this traditional understanding of biblical gender roles sometimes point to Galatians 3:28 as the argument for eliminating gender roles.<sup>13</sup> However, in the context of that passage, the apostle Paul is not eliminating gender roles when he says that in Christ there is no male or female. Egalitarians agree that Paul was certainly talking about salvation, but add that the unity created in Christ also manifests itself “in the social dimensions of the church.”<sup>14</sup> Thomas Schreiner writes, “There are clearly social implications that can be drawn” from this unity in Christ; “the social implications, however, must also include what Paul wrote elsewhere. Paul affirms the oneness of males and females in Christ, but he does not claim that maleness and femaleness are irrelevant in every respect.”<sup>15</sup> The context of the Galatians 3:28 passage shows that there is no distinction between male or female when it comes to being a child of God and receiving the inheritance. In Christ, the firstborn male child in a family has no advantage over a female child since Jesus Himself is the “firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15). Paul makes the comparison to the man who is free in this life having no advantage over the slave, and to the person of Jewish descent having no advantage over the Gentile.

Again, Ortlund writes, “It is God who wants men to be men and women to be women; and He can teach us the meaning of each, if we want to be taught.”<sup>16</sup> Humility is a necessary quality in order to understand what God intends. To help counselees arrive at a place of humility, they need to understand more about God Himself. What a person believes about gender and assigned roles will have implications in counseling. However, the complaints a person may have with gender roles stem from their own underlying issues

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<sup>13</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, “Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?,” in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 161-81.

<sup>14</sup> Tatha Wiley, *Paul and the Gentile Women: Reframing Galatians* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 96.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 259.

<sup>16</sup> Ortlund, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” 125.

with God Himself. By seeing God as one who humbled Himself as a servant, as one who Himself has submitted, students should be able to recognize their own arrogance in seeking to be above Jesus (Matt 10:24). Trusting in the goodness of the Creator God and His design, instead of letting pride creep in, is crucial for seeing gender and gender roles properly.

Though emotions can often get in the way and distract a person from seeing God's goodness, God still graciously gives wisdom and understanding when anyone seeks Him and asks (Jas 1:5). A major temptation can be for people to focus on aspects of gender that are difficult to understand in modern society while neglecting to see the beauty of God's design of gender. Gregg Johnson notes, "We excel at different gifts, and all the gifts are needed."<sup>17</sup> The unique roles and gifts of both men and women should be valued and honored in the home and in the church. In Scripture is seen positive admonitions of gender distinctions and the gifts each bring to the table, so it is important not to direct the focus solely on what one may deem as a negative or find hard to understand. Helping counselees dwell on the character of God and what they can see as good distinctions between genders is a helpful step in the right direction.

### **The Purpose of Sex**

Like gender roles, the biblical narrative also proclaims the purpose of sex. The ultimate purpose of sex is the same for every part of a Christian's life, which is to glorify God. Paul Tripp shows how everything should be framed in this way:

You must begin by understanding the importance, the life-shaping significance, of the first four words of the Bible. You could argue that there are no more important words than these, that everything else the Bible says is built on the foundation of the thunderous implication of these four words. You can't understand yourself, you can't understand life, and you surely can't have a balanced view of the world of sex without understanding the worldview of these four words. Your Bible begins with these four

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<sup>17</sup> Gregg Johnson, "The Biological Basis for Gender-Specific Behavior," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 369.

words: “In the beginning, God” (Gen. 1:1), and with those words everything in life is given its shape, purpose, and meaning.<sup>18</sup>

The understanding that everything starts with God and is for God helps humanity utilize His creation for His intended purpose. The secular world cannot comprehend the connection between sex and glorifying God, except by insisting that if there is a God and He invented sex, then it must be good. In *What Is The Meaning Of Sex?*, Burk explains how human society must be careful of deeming all sexual activity as good:

Just as the stomach is made for food, so also sexual organs are made for sex. What could possibly be wrong with using the body according to its purpose? Paul exposes the folly of this argument with, ‘yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.’ Paul does not question that the body is made for sex (a subordinate end), but he does say that the body exists for the Lord (the ultimate end). The Corinthians had fixated on the subordinate end of the body and had missed the ultimate end of God’s glory. In doing so, they misconstrued how the subordinate end must serve the ultimate end. Sex is not to be enjoyed for its own sake but for God’s sake. Enjoying sex for God’s sake means shunning every sexual union outside of the covenanted union of one man and one woman. Since the body exists “for the Lord,” its proper use must be under the lordship of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

If one is to fulfill the purpose of sex as glorifying God, then many sexual actions are off-limits. Winston Smith says the Genesis narrative also changes the way a person sees other people, no longer viewing them as mere objects to be used for pleasure and purposes, but as image bearers of the Creator God. He writes, “Sex reminds us and celebrates the fact that we were made for intimacy, made to be known and loved, and made to know and love others.”<sup>20</sup> If mankind is going to glorify God through the act of sex, then it will begin with not only honoring God’s boundaries for sex, but also by recognizing sex as a way to express love and service toward one’s own spouse instead of being for one’s own self.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Sex in a Broken World: How Christ Redeems What Sin Distorts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 41-42.

<sup>19</sup> Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 50-51.

<sup>20</sup> Winston Smith, “What’s Right about Sex?,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 26, no. 2 (2012): 23.

Too often, the emphasis of sex is on pleasure. Sex is reduced to something that makes a person feel good. Pleasure does play a role in sex. Garrett Kell writes, “Sex should cause us to marvel at Jesus because all its pleasures point to the glorious one who made them.”<sup>21</sup> Certainly, God created sex to be pleasurable, not painful. By making the process for procreation pleasurable, God’s design ensured the continued multiplication of humanity. There is danger though in focusing primarily on the pleasure of sex (or any other created thing for that matter). Tripp warns, “Only when your heart is controlled by a higher pleasure, the pleasure of God, can you handle pleasure without being addicted to it.”<sup>22</sup> However, self-pleasure is generally the way people (including professing Christians) view sex. Owen Strachan writes,

Sex is not given to humanity as a utilitarian pleasure, to be accessed however and wherever one sees fit. Sex belongs to marriage. Take sex away from marriage, and we are robbed of the fullness of one-flesh union; take marriage away from sex, and the spiritual dimension of one-flesh union is diminished. Sex becomes a merely physical act, whereas God intends it to have numerous dimensions, each of them pleasing to him, each of them a blessing to his creation. Sex in the biblical mind is not the act of amorous romantic contractors joining together for a spasm of fun. Sex is deeply unitive and is in fact designed to concretize the spiritual bond of a couple.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the self-pleasure focus that many people have regarding sex, many turn to viewing pornography and to the practice of masturbation when sex with a partner is not available. Jeffrey Black explains the danger of misusing sex in this way:

Masturbation is sex with yourself. If I’m having sex with myself, I don’t have to invest myself in another person. People who are “addicted” to pornography aren’t so much addicted to lurid material as they’re addicted to self-centeredness. They’re committed to serving themselves, to doing whatever they can to find a convenient way not to die to self, which is the nature of companionship in a relationship.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> J. Garrett Kell, *Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the Promises of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 47.

<sup>22</sup> Tripp, *Sex in a Broken World*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Owen Strachan, “Transition or Transformation?,” in Beilby and Eddy, *Understanding Transgender Identities*, 66.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Black, “Pornography, Masturbation, and Other Private Misuses: A Perversion of Intimacy,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 3 (1995): 8.

When people fail to grasp and remember the purpose of God’s design of sex, it ends up being misused for selfish purposes. When selfishness invades, community is damaged. Tripp contends, “One of the horrific things about pornography is the way in which it is fundamentally antirelational. Sex is reduced to graphic fantasies, sexual activities, and sexual climax. There is not even a consideration of relationship, let alone committed marital love.”<sup>25</sup>

Sex becomes selfish because it is also wrongly viewed as a “need,” even among some Christian psychologists.<sup>26</sup> Such beliefs can lead to misuse, as well as a wrong attitude toward God, which Alasdair Groves points out:

If a man thinks “I really need sex in order to stay healthy,” then, for example, a single man struggling to keep himself pure from pornography is in a no-win situation. On the one hand, he is supposed to refrain from looking at porn, because God has told him it is wrong. On the other hand, God has given him a physical need but no way to meet it. When sex is a need rather than a beautiful and relational act of intimacy in marriage, it becomes easy to blame God for putting him in an impossible situation.<sup>27</sup>

Sex is not a biological need. It is good and healthy within the proper boundary of marriage between a husband and wife. It has many benefits, both physical and mental. However, sex cannot be called a basic “need.” To call something that one desires a “need” will make it difficult to resist when temptation comes. To classify sex as a need would also mean that all single people have a need that is not met.

The apostle Paul obviously did not feel he was lacking in this area, as he wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:7, “I wish that all were as I am” (referring to being unmarried). He would never make such a statement for a basic necessity such as food or water. He would not say he is lacking food and wishing that everyone else lacked it as well. Therefore, sex does not fit into that category, and counselors can help students to recognize this in their

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<sup>25</sup> Tripp, *Sex in a Broken World*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> Juli Slattery, “Sex Is a Physical Need,” *Focus on the Family*, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/sex-and-intimacy/understanding-your-husbands-sexual-needs/sex-is-a-physical-need>.

<sup>27</sup> J. Alasdair Groves, “Exposing the Lies of Pornography and Counseling the Men Who Believe Them,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 1 (2013): 9.

own lives. This understanding of sex has tremendous impact not only on young men and women who are dating, but also on the argument against homosexuality. To understand sex as a legitimate need for humanity creates an excuse for those who struggle with same-sex attraction, yet are called by the church to celibacy, to feel like they should be able to fulfill those desires. Sam Allberry argues, “Jesus himself was single” and “He was the most fully human and complete person who ever lived.”<sup>28</sup> If Jesus was fully human during His earthly life, then He had the same needs every person today has in their life. If sex was a human need, then Jesus would have been lacking.

To counsel students biblically, they need more than an insistence on sexual abstinence. In *Pure in Heart*, Kell writes, “Purity for purity’s sake is a powerful form of self-serving idolatry that hinders us from seeing God. Jesus continually rebuked religious leaders for being outwardly clean but inwardly dead (see Matt. 23: 27–28).”<sup>29</sup> Tripp states that just because a person does not have sex with someone does not mean that a relationship is healthy either.<sup>30</sup> An unhealthy relationship could involve one person lusting after another. People need to be taught the purpose of sex and how to have healthy God-honoring relationships. Tripp is right when he insists that sex exposes the idolatry and selfishness of hearts, revealing that “our pleasures are often more valuable to us than God’s purposes,” and that people do not always love their neighbors since they are “willing at points to use another human being for [our] own purposes and pleasures.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction*, Questions Christians Ask (Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2013), 52.

<sup>29</sup> Kell, *Pure in Heart*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Teens & Sex: How Should We Teach Them?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Tripp, *Sex in a Broken World*, 96.

## Desires and Identity

While understanding the purpose behind gender and sex can help people see certain aspects of creation as God intended, knowing the purpose itself does not solve the confusion and wrong attitudes people may have in their hearts. Many people today know cognitively what God has said, yet their feelings and desires tell a completely different story. Rosaria Butterfield warns, “All our personal feelings prove is that Original Sin and the deceptiveness of sin are inseparable.”<sup>32</sup> The natural inclination for humanity is to follow their heart’s desires. Ultimately, the solution for all of humanity is knowing God Himself in the person of Jesus. But it is challenging to help people move in His direction when they are putting their trust in their own feelings or desires.

People today are often told that whatever they desire is the best indicator of who they truly are. Smith writes, “The modern narrative tends to be a biological narrative: you are a slave to your evolved sexual instincts. The old polytheistic myths have been replaced by a libidinal myth. You and others exist to serve the imperatives of your lust.”<sup>33</sup> Most people who are engaged in following their sexual instincts do not think about what they are doing as being enslaved, but that is exactly what is happening when a person is driven merely by their desires; and sexual desires certainly are some of the most powerful in the human heart. When the desires of the heart are not rooted in God and His Word, then they drift toward all kinds of evil. Scripture calls this the desires of the flesh (Rom 13:14; Gal 5:16-17). Christopher Yuan writes, “The moral value of any desire is determined by whether its ‘end’ transgresses or conforms to God’s standard. In fact, all desire is teleological. The Greek word *telos* means ‘end, goal, or purpose.’ Thus, every desire has an end, goal, or purpose. Without an end, a desire simply wouldn’t be desire.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2015), 35, Kindle.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, “What’s Right about Sex?,” 19.

<sup>34</sup> Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2018), 61.

Helping a counselee understand when a desire is not from God and for God is essential to bringing about repentance. To arrive at that point, counselees need to know what God's desires are, as can be found in the Bible. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian church, he made clear that "this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality" (4:3). If a person is not sure of God's desire for his life regarding sexuality, then it can be beneficial to point him to a passage like 1 Thessalonians 4.

Smith also notes, "One of the odd behaviors of sinners/slaves is our constant drive to escape our status as slaves by enslaving others. It seems we cannot help but look at others and ask, 'How can they serve me?'"<sup>35</sup> Such an attitude is dangerous. This situation might play out in relationships, as a young person seeks to satisfy his or her desires by sexual intimacy with another. If this is the goal, then the young person misses the purposes of sexual intimacy and pleasure, which has at the forefront the opportunity to serve his or her spouse, not self (1 Cor 7:3-5).<sup>36</sup> To focus on sex as self-serving is a prime example of idolatry. Richard Lints writes concerning idolatry:

At the heart of worship is a sense of "giving yourself away" to another. Key to worship then are the questions "To whom are you giving yourself away and in what manner are you giving yourself?" Genuine worship is giving yourself to the living God in whom and for whom you have been created. Idolatry by contrast is substituting the true object of worship (God) for an imitation (idol) and reorienting the relationship from worship to possession.<sup>37</sup>

If humanity is going to glorify God through sex, then it is necessary that they view sex as an opportunity to serve one's own spouse. In addition, one cannot love and serve someone sexually if they are not their spouse. Kell clarifies, "Sex outside of marriage is not an act of true love. True love never does anything to harm another person's relationship with God. Love leads people toward Jesus, not away from him."<sup>38</sup> Based on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10,

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, "What's Right about Sex?," 20.

<sup>36</sup> Kell, *Pure in Heart*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 36 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 156.

<sup>38</sup> Kell, *Pure in Heart*, chap. 5.

any sexual intimacy outside of the biblical definition leads to God's judgement, so it would not be loving or serving to lead them into judgement.

While there is a danger in following one's own desires and feelings, positives come from these things arising in a person's heart. Alasdair Groves and Winston Smith write, "One of the most important things the Bible tells us about our emotions is they are an expression of what we value or love."<sup>39</sup> Desires and feelings can reveal hidden sin and show people that they are sinners. For example, a woman might be outwardly living in submission to her husband, all the while desiring to rule over him. Or a man might be outwardly nice to his wife, while inwardly seeking to manipulate her instead of serving her. If one is merely judged by outward behavior, then these two people would be considered without sin. However, if they recognize their deeper desire for control, then they begin to understand the depth of their own sinfulness and need for the grace of God. Likewise, improper sexual desires can reveal to people their own selfishness, covetousness, and idolatry, even if they have not outwardly revealed a sexual sin. Students today need to be taught the proper place of desires and feelings, and how to view them in light of Scripture. If Scripture is sufficient for all of life, then it is important to be willing to humbly see when one's desires seem to contradict God's design and commands.

On the other hand, a person does not have to be ruled by his or her desires. Those desires should not dominate their lives. Butterfield asks, "How do I know if I am cherishing sin? When we defend our right to a particular sin, when we claim it as an 'I am,' or a defining character trait, we are cherishing it, and separating ourselves from the God who promises rest for our soul through repentance and forgiveness."<sup>40</sup> Desires do not have to define a person, yet many act as if they do. This is shown through the vast number of individuals who are connecting their identity with a feeling or sexual desire,

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<sup>39</sup> J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith, *Untangling Emotions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 32.

<sup>40</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 34.

such as bisexual, homosexual, or transgender. Instead of embracing sinful desires, a Christian should follow the apostle Paul's instruction to the Galatian church and crucify the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal 5:24). Unfortunately, some professing Christians would claim that desires are not sinful if they are not acted upon. This has stirred an enormous debate today between professing Christians (even evangelicals) as to whether or not same-sex attraction is sinful or neutral.<sup>41</sup>

Preston Sprinkle argues against the NASB translating *arsenokoites* as “homosexuals” when he writes,

Many people are considered “homosexual” (that is, gay) regardless of whether they are having sex with other men. And while the word “homosexual” includes both men and women, *arsenokoites* only refers to men. . . . I know several self-identified gay men who are attracted to men but would never have sex with other men because they believe the Bible condemns such an act. None of them are *arsenokoites*.<sup>42</sup>

Such an argument may sound quite convincing at first. However, one must understand that the modern idea of sexual orientation removes the stigma of sinfulness. Butterfield is concerned that orientation “forgets that Original Sin is everyone’s preexisting condition.”<sup>43</sup> She further notes that orientation is dangerous because it is said “to encompass every fiber of a person’s selfhood, from margin to center.”<sup>44</sup> While Scripture is plain regarding the sinfulness of homosexual acts, many argue that the desire is not harmful or sinful. In *Transforming Homosexuality*, Denny Burk and Heath Lambert say that when defining orientation, it means many different things, but it is never less than sexual desire.<sup>45</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not dismiss thoughts and desires that were not acted

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<sup>41</sup> The Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) has been debating this issue. “Report of the PCA Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality,” May 2020, <https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20-1.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Preston M. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 119.

<sup>43</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 114.

<sup>44</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 28.

upon. He said that “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:28). Therefore, the person is guilty of breaking the Law of God. Ed Welch notes, “If the deed was prohibited in Scripture, the desire was too.”<sup>46</sup>

Homosexual desire does not fit into a different category that would make it permissible. James Brownson, who attempts to argue for the acceptability of homosexuality for Christians, says, “Before God, if an action is wrong, the inward impulse toward that action is equally culpable.”<sup>47</sup> He makes the point that those who adhere to the traditional biblical understanding regarding homosexuality cannot say that only the behavior is sinful without condemning the desire. However, Brownson attempts to use that to his viewpoint’s advantage by asking where the line is drawn. The line becomes grey when asking whether a same-sex attracted person is sinning by simply admiring someone else’s beauty, or if they desire a deep friendship with someone of the same sex.<sup>48</sup> But Brownson and others who hold to his position fail to recognize that to embrace same-sex desire would be to embrace covetousness. Coveting is desiring something that God has not given to you. Burk and Lambert point out that a same-sex attracted person is desiring more “from the same sex than what God says is good for such a person to have.”<sup>49</sup> Biblical counselors, therefore, should not treat desires as neutral. While the desires will not disappear overnight, they should not be embraced simply because they remain in the heart of a counselee.

It is crucial that one understands from where desires come. As James 1:14 tells, they come from within. When people do not have a heart for God, their heart gravitates

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<sup>46</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Homosexuality: Speaking the Truth in Love* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 13.

<sup>47</sup> James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 175.

<sup>48</sup> Butterfield argues, “Homosociality is an abiding and deep comfort afforded in keeping company with your own gender, and finding within your own gender your most important and cherished friendships. This is not a sin. Neither is this ‘gay.’ But once that comfort level shifts to sexually desiring a person with whom you are not biblically married, you are in sin.” Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Burk and Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality*, 89.

toward other things. The human heart does not naturally move toward God. Instead, humanity is more inclined toward selfish desires. Biblical counselors need to help students have a proper understanding of how to recognize and place desires and to know where they come from.

Identity is another crucial issue that drives a person's behavior. In *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, Jeremy Pierre discusses the origins of a person's identity: "Within every human heart, there is a given identity and constructed identity. People's given identities are simply who God has designed them to be and how God has designed them to function in the world."<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, most people do not understand or believe their God-given identity. Instead, their primary identity is shaped by the world around them as a constructed identity. It could be their family, friends, teachers, or any other influential beings in their lives, or it can be their own feelings that help shape their identity. What they believe about themselves seems to take the top role in deciding identity, regardless of how inaccurate they may be in their self-assessment.

By understanding one's own God-given identity, counselees are able to grab hold of something that is not changing based on what someone else says or thinks of them. Pierre argues that one's understanding of their God-given identity must include several important elements from Scripture. They need to know that, as a created being, they are dependent on God, yet they are valued by Him, while also being "bad and broken" because of sin.<sup>51</sup> However, the good news is that those who place their faith in Jesus Christ have been redeemed (Gal 4:5) and transformed into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Butterfield writes, "New creature in Christ' means that we have a new mind that governs the old

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<sup>50</sup> Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 127.

<sup>51</sup> Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 131-33.

feelings and a new hope that we are part of Christ's body."<sup>52</sup> This brings hope to an otherwise bleak situation in a struggling person's life.

To help counselees who have a wrong view of their identity, biblical counselors should assist counselees to realign their view of themselves, ultimately to see themselves as created in the image of God and recipients of His grace. Once again, Pierre accurately writes that they need to consider the sources that have influenced the construction of their identity, especially identifying unreliable sources. He also says they need to recognize if they have disordered a certain part of their life, making it their central identity. Lastly, Pierre shares the need to investigate the purpose of their identity, asking if it glorifies self or God.<sup>53</sup>

A healthy and biblical understanding of desires and identity are essential for the Christian life. Since the desires of the flesh constantly push a person away from God and His design, believers must humbly recognize how easily desires become self-serving. Christians need to prayerfully ask God to help them see what is below the surface in their own heart, not allowing desires to define them or look for a way to excuse ungodly desires. As they draw an understanding of their true identity from Scripture (recognizing their God-given identity), they are able to guard against identities that the world may try to impose upon them.

### **Homosexuality and Same-Sex Attraction**

One of the most prominent sinful expressions of identity, gender roles, and sexuality is seen in homosexuality. People that identify as homosexual and engage in homosexual activity are straying from God's good design. Such people are denying their proper identity, since all of humanity is called to reflect their creator, Jesus Christ. Lints writes regarding idolatry: "Idols represent the inversion of the original theological order

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<sup>52</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 106.

<sup>53</sup> Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 140-44.

of representation and reflection. The idols depict an exchange of the glory of God for the foolishness of this world (Rom. 1:23).<sup>54</sup> Thus, homosexuality exchanges God’s design for what the world says is acceptable.

An issue develops among those who believe homosexuality and Christianity are compatible since they often view humanity as good, not sinful. One might appeal to Genesis 1 to demonstrate that God created everything and called it all “good.” Indeed, He did call it good, but that was before the Fall when sin entered the world. Allberry, who has been outspoken about his own same-sex attraction, said in an interview: “The fact that it feels natural to me is not a sign of how God has created me; it’s a sign of how sin has distorted me.”<sup>55</sup> Donald Zeyl, professor emeritus at the University of Rhode Island, released a book on homosexuality and the Bible in which he describes the “neo-progressive” view. The introduction reads,

This position agrees with the two conservative positions that the Bible’s account of God’s design for gender, sexuality, and marriage is heteronormative. On the other hand, it also argues that God sometimes creates individuals in ways that do not align with that design. This raises the question of whether God’s will for human sexual relationships always and invariably follows God’s design or whether God’s requirements for such relationships may be “accommodated” to the way God actually creates people. This position, then, combines the affirmation of traditional biblical norms for gender, sexuality, and marriage in general with openness to the permissibility of same-sex relationships and marriage for those whom God has created in a way that is not in alignment with those norms.<sup>56</sup>

Zeyl believes that this position is the answer for the church, yet it is still appealing to the natural state as not only the true self, but also the purest part of self. In 2018, the Human Rights Campaign published a guide entitled, “Coming Home to Evangelicalism and to Self.”<sup>57</sup> In the publication, the Human Rights Campaign includes quotes from professing

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<sup>54</sup> Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 103.

<sup>55</sup> Sam Allberry, “Our Desires, Our Selves? Michael S. Horton Interviews Sam Allberry,” White Horse Inn, August 31, 2015, <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/article/our-desires-our-selves/>.

<sup>56</sup> Donald J. Zeyl, *Four (and A Half) Dialogues on Homosexuality and the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022), introduction, Kindle.

<sup>57</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Coming Home to Evangelicalism and to Self,” accessed October 25, 2018, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-home-to-evangelicalism-and-to-self>.

evangelical leaders who believe homosexuality is compatible with Christianity. One such leader noted, “Often, church teaching would state that the Bible declares being LGBTQ an ‘abomination.’ Yet, these same LGBTQ people of faith know deep within that they were born this way. The church’s ruling against them contradicts their own profound awareness of self.”<sup>58</sup> This is an example of how the self is elevated in LGBTQ theology, even significantly influencing the way Scripture is interpreted. Starting with the belief that the self is naturally good is a fundamental flaw in their belief system. If people do not believe that they are naturally sinful, then they have no need for transformation, which would make them a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

In *God and the Gay Christian*, Matthew Vines (a proponent of homosexuality as a legitimate Christian lifestyle) even asks, “What is the gospel if it doesn’t bring transformation?”<sup>59</sup> His perceived view of gospel transformation does not seem to include sexuality. Vines’ question demonstrates that the gospel is most certainly at stake in the debate regarding homosexuality. This is clearly seen when he writes, “Affirming same-sex relationships wouldn’t change the Bible’s core truths about sin, repentance, and redemption. In fact, given that same-sex orientation is consistent with God’s image, affirming same-sex relationships is the only way to *defend* those truths with clarity, coherence, and persuasiveness.”<sup>60</sup> If a person believes that his homosexual desires, being sinful, cannot be changed, then he denies the power of the gospel. Even if such a person recognizes that his homosexual desires have been existent since he began developing sexually, his goal should not be to embrace those desires, but to repent of them and believe the gospel. The apostle Paul wrote, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). God is not limited to the extent

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<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Coming Home to Evangelicalism and to Self.”

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014), 16.

<sup>60</sup> Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 161.

to which He can change a person. Homosexual desire can be a prime example of God making the impossible possible and making the once homosexual a new person in Christ. Instead, many seek to justify their desires by their own so-called experience, as did another professing evangelical leader who said she “felt very much like God was saying ‘You’re gay. I made you this way. You’re fine. This is who you are.’”<sup>61</sup> If one reads Scripture carefully and humbly, it becomes clear that God never affirms humanity as being “fine,” but He shows the depravity of sin and offers hope for change. Butterfield says, “Scripture warns us against the danger of denying our guilt, even when the sin with which we struggle is unasked for and unwanted. That is, Scripture warns us against pitting our point of view against God’s: 1 John 1:8: says, ‘If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.’”<sup>62</sup>

As biblical counselors strive to help those struggling with homosexual desire or same-sex attraction, it is helpful to demonstrate not only the need for change, but also the power of God to change a person. Numerous examples from Scripture speak of lives that were changed in miraculous ways, such as a man born blind (John 9), a woman with continuous bleeding (Mark 5), a paralyzed man (Luke 5), and a man with a legion of demons (Mark 5). No one would have believed that there was hope for these people, but then they encountered Jesus. After the blind man was healed, people even thought he was someone else (John 9:9). In modern times, the assumption is that some people cannot change. For the homosexual or same-sex attracted, these stories from the Gospels provide an example outside of the emotionally charged and deeply personal issue that they are wrestling with. They can be reminded that while no one can change themselves, God can do the seemingly impossible.

Paul describes many issues that the people in the Corinthian church had dealt with in their past. First Corinthians 6:9-11 says,

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<sup>61</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Coming Home to Evangelicalism and to Self.”

<sup>62</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 55-56.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Homosexuality is by no means the worst sin that exists, but it is included in this list of sins which keep a person from the kingdom of God. However, the important phrase comes in verse 11: “Such were some of you.” He clearly gives the indication that the lives of these people in the church had been changed. They no longer carried identities of idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, drunkards, and such. A change had taken place that transformed their identities. The gospel must bring transformation if it is the good news that is to be proclaimed. It is helpful to once again hear from Butterfield, who has seen this transformation in her own life. She writes,

Deliverance from a lifelong sin pattern means that you—with God’s strength—have the ability to not act on that which God forbids, and to not love that which God abhors. It also means that if you fall, through repentance, you are renewed, knowing that falling does not mean falling away. It means that you grow in humility, knowing that you need the Lord every step of the way.<sup>63</sup>

While sanctification in the life of Christians who have struggled with homosexuality may not mean that they will never encounter same-sex desires again, Christians’ love for Christ and their newfound identity in Him should help them battle those disordered desires, with the help of the Holy Spirit who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26).

### **Transgenderism**

While the major argument to legitimize homosexuality has long been that gay people are born gay, the rise in transgenderism has thrown greater confusion into that argument. In a podcast discussing the change in the “born this way” narrative, Albert Mohler points out that in past decades “there’s been a concerted effort to try to argue that it is basically innate, it’s predetermined, it’s probably biological or genetic, and in any

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<sup>63</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 55.

sense it is supposed to remove the entire category of morality from the entire discussion.”<sup>64</sup> There was a strategic reason for the past understanding of homosexuality as being the natural state of many human beings. The understanding of sin and depravity prevented the full acceptance of homosexuality in society and in the church. Once homosexuality was no longer viewed as sinful, the “born this way” language would need to be forced out of the discussion to make way for the full acceptance of transgenderism, which is an argument against the biological sex with which a person is born. This is important because the ever-changing understanding of gender in society is contrasted by the unchanging truth of God.

J. Alan Branch defines transgenderism as “an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth,” whereas gender dysphoria is “the clinical diagnosis for the experience of distress for people who have a marked incongruence between the gender associated with their natal sex and the gender they would like to be.”<sup>65</sup> For the Christian striving to understand all of life in light of God’s Word, there is no possibility that the Creator God would put a human being in the wrong body. Such a belief diminishes God as Creator and sovereign over all. Strachan rightly says that God’s desire is for human beings to “receive their body, and thus their sex, as a gift.”<sup>66</sup> Those in the transgender community do not view their bodies as a gift, but as something that is their own possession and can be changed to fit their own desires and suit their own perceived needs. Strachan’s quote points to a deeper issue for those in the transgender community, which is a lack of thankfulness to God. The lack of thankfulness is mentioned in Romans 1:21, where the apostle Paul wrote of the ungodly: “For although

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<sup>64</sup> Albert Mohler, “The Briefing: June 23, 2017,” <https://albertmohler.com/2017/06/23/briefing-06-23-17/>.

<sup>65</sup> J. Alan Branch, *Affirming God’s Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 25, Kindle.

<sup>66</sup> Owen Strachan, “The Clarity of Complementarity: Gender Dysphoria in Biblical Perspective,” *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no. 2 (2017): 39.

they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” In counseling individuals from the Bible regarding transgenderism, it is crucial that they see the importance of gratitude and thanksgiving toward God. A lack of thanksgiving leads to discontentment beyond mere circumstances, which can be demonstrated in being discontent with one’s own body. Kell says, “A grumbling heart feels justified in sinful escapes, but a thankful one finds contentment in whatever God provides.”<sup>67</sup> Not only does the need for thanksgiving to God apply to those who wrestle with transgenderism, but for all issues of sexual purity and sin in general.

One of the challenges regarding transgenderism as compared to homosexuality is that the Bible does not specifically address the issue. Some people make the claim that eunuchs in the Bible would fall into the category now referred to as transgender.<sup>68</sup> Such interpretation does not hold up since the purpose of eunuchs would have been for the protection of women in the royal court, as opposed to a male feeling that he is a female. Mark Yarhouse does not believe that there is any evidence to show eunuchs as “a different gender or gender dysphoric.”<sup>69</sup> In support of Scripture speaking to transgenderism, one might point to the Bible’s prohibition of cross-dressing (Deut 22:5). However, that prohibition alone does not cover all that is involved with people who believe they are facing gender dysphoria.

To see the sufficiency of Scripture to relate to those struggling with this issue, biblical counselors might need to address broader principles related to transgenderism. For example, a helpful aspect to remember in counseling is God’s design for humanity as

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<sup>67</sup> Kell, *Pure in Heart*, 118.

<sup>68</sup> Teresa J. Hornsby and Deryn Guest, *Transgender, Intersex and Biblical Interpretation*, Semeia Studies 83 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 18.

<sup>69</sup> Mark A. Yarhouse and Christian Association for Psychological Studies, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies Books (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 34.

image bearers. Every human being was created to reflect the character and attributes of the Creator God. Jason DeRouchie points to Deuteronomy 22:5 as showing that even cross-dressing distorts God’s created order: “We hurt the entire community both in the way we fail to point them to gospel righteousness and in the way we open them up for God’s just wrath.”<sup>70</sup> When individuals focus on themselves and fail to accept the responsibility of an image-bearer, they harm not only themselves but those around them. This is an aspect some professing Christians have failed to see. Mark Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky ask, “Is it fair to label all desires to cross-dress as ‘ungodly, sinful, God-dishonoring’ desires? In conversations with those with gender dysphoria, it seems unclear that the desire flows from a place of rebellion, refusal to submit to God, or volitional sin.”<sup>71</sup> Whether or not a person’s conscious decision is to rebel against God, a man who dresses as a woman, or a woman who dresses as a man, does not glorify God or spur others to worship, but causes confusion.

DeRouchie also points out in regard to Deuteronomy 22:5 that “what was at stake in Moses’ law was gender identity and expression and gender confusion, and it is from this perspective that our outward apparel matters.”<sup>72</sup> Another helpful passage would be 1 Corinthians 11:14-15, which speaks of the prohibition for men to have long hair. For a man to have long hair was called a “disgrace,” as it would have been understood as being feminine. Even if the Bible does not specifically address those who feel that their gender does not correlate with their biological sex, it is important not to doubt the sufficiency of Scripture.

As students are being counseled, they do not need to hear either extreme of harsh condemnation or mere acceptance. Helping the counselee to understand where they are

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<sup>70</sup> Jason DeRouchie, “Confronting the Transgender Storm: New Covenant Reflections on Deuteronomy 22:5,” *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 21, no. 1 (2016): 65.

<sup>71</sup> Mark A. Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky, “Response to Owen Strachan,” in Beilby and Eddy, *Understanding Transgender Identities*, 87.

<sup>72</sup> DeRouchie, “Confronting the Transgender Storm,” 68.

sinful can be difficult. Andrew Walker argues in *God and the Transgender Debate* that “to feel that your body is one sex and your self is a different gender is not sinful.”<sup>73</sup> This must be carefully nuanced as biblical counselors seek to help those wrestling with feelings of gender dysphoria. For a feeling to arise is not inherently sinful, but to embrace that feeling or to desire to be the opposite sex would most certainly be sinful. To counsel students in this situation, they need to be reminded to trust who God says that they are. There is a tendency for people, especially those embracing gender dysphoria, to see themselves as victims. Strachan wisely advises,

It is essential that, in counseling, Christian pastors, elders, and leaders help struggling individuals see that they are not victims. They may once have been victimized, to be sure; the biblical doctrine of depravity accounts in full for the terrible misdeeds happening all around us. But even if they have gone through deep waters, they will find hope and healing in rejecting victimhood. They must come out of the waters.<sup>74</sup>

Counselees need to recognize their sinfulness as well as the hope they have in Christ. Without either, the results could be damaging to the counselee. Studies have indicated that transgendered individuals have a much higher rate of attempted suicide than the rest of the population. One study showed the suicide attempt rate at over 40 percent for transgender people, so the importance of learning to help such individuals is crucial.<sup>75</sup> A statistic like this seems to make clear that transgender individuals know that something is not as it should be, but they often look to the wrong places (surgery, medication, and human approval) in attempt to make things right. It is not clear as to specific reasons why transgender individuals attempt suicide at such a high rate; there can be several factors, so people on both sides of the debate must be careful not to attribute the high rate directly to the teachings of the church or to dissatisfaction from transitional surgery or

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<sup>73</sup> Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 67.

<sup>74</sup> Strachan, “Transition or Transformation?,” 82.

<sup>75</sup> Ann P. Haas, Philip L. Rodgers, and Jody L. Herman, “Suicide Attempts among Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Adults: Findings of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey,” The Williams Institute, January 2014, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf>.

pharmaceuticals. Counseling must be done compassionately and with the wisdom of God from His Word, regardless of what the individual feels or believes.

In counseling people wrestling with gender dysphoria or transgenderism, major counseling issues obviously need to be addressed, especially with those who have transitioned to the opposite sex by taking hormones or even sex-reassignment surgery. However, in counseling students, it is unlikely that counselors would encounter these situations. They are much more likely to encounter students in the beginning stages of the transition. Biblical counselors can help prevent further complications by guiding students before they have taken the more extreme steps toward fully embracing transgenderism.

### **Counseling Strategy**

There are many unique challenges when counseling students regarding gender or sexuality issues. The most challenging issue is that these arguments tend to be deeply personal. Butterfield says that sexual sin is especially hard to deal with because it often becomes a “sin of identity.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, a student who feels that their gender differs from their biological sex or a student who has sexual attraction toward the same sex will often sense any objection to their viewpoint as an attack on their identity. Gender and sexuality issues differ greatly from other challenges a counselor may face with college students, such as alcohol and drug use, or even depression or anxiety (which a student would see as a problem, not their identity). Yuan gives the comparison that “being a gossip is not who he is but what he does. Or being an adulteress is not who she is but what she does. Being a hater is not who he is but what he does. . . . The terms heterosexual and homosexual turn desire into personhood, experience into ontology.”<sup>77</sup> Even gender roles can be an extremely sensitive subject, especially for females, who view biblical standards as an attack on what they may wish to achieve in life. One egalitarian wrote, “If gender-

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<sup>76</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 8.

based hierarchy is allowed to continue destroying lives and disrupting God’s work of redeeming a broken world, it plays into Satan’s hand.”<sup>78</sup> Biblical counselors can certainly expect pushback when addressing these matters.

Another unique challenge regarding gender and sexuality comes from the cultural climate. As years go by, students entering college will have only known a society where gay marriage is legal, and where they are taught that gender identity is to be gauged by one’s own feelings. The biblical understanding of gender and sexuality is no longer the norm, therefore a student’s view of normal will be according to the cultural standards. The culture is saying that an orthodox understanding of sin (including gender and sexuality sins) causes “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, self-harm, and suicide, among other tragedies.”<sup>79</sup> They say that teachings such as biblical marriage are “spiritually and psychologically toxic.”<sup>80</sup> Mohler warns that the issue “is a question as to whether or not the Bible—as it has been understood by the Christian church for 2000 years—is either divine truth, and thus it is for our good, or it is an instrument of psychological harm to LGBTQ youth and young people.”<sup>81</sup> While the culture may be firmly against God’s standards, biblical counselors must remember and teach that God orchestrates believers to experience repentance from sins related to gender and sexuality in the same way that He calls one to repent from every other sin. Strachan writes,

The Bible does not lift up our heads in quite the same way as our sin-denying therapeutic culture does. The culture says that we are fine just the way we are and that acknowledging this fact will make us whole. The Bible says that we must turn from brokenness and that doing so in view of divine grace will make all things brand new. One view leaves us a victim, trapped in a self-affirmation loop that never truly addresses our sin and our suffering. The other view rejects victimhood, squares

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<sup>78</sup> Mathews, *Gender Roles and the People of God*, 237.

<sup>79</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 84.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Achtemeier, *The Bible’s Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical’s Change of Heart* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 11.

<sup>81</sup> Albert Mohler, “The Briefing: August 30, 2017,” <https://albertmohler.com/2017/08/30/briefing-08-30-17/>.

honestly with the darkness of our hearts and our world, and calls us all to walk in newness of life.<sup>82</sup>

Just as every sin was redeemed by Jesus Christ on the cross, rebellion against God's gender and sexuality standards are certainly included. Biblical counselors need to strongly communicate this hope while calling counselees to repentance. Tripp, speaking specifically of the call to sexual purity, explains,

It starts by confessing your profound need and that you are unable to change what needs to be changed. Sexual purity doesn't begin with setting up a regimen for behavioral change. It begins with mourning the condition of your heart, and when you do, you can rest assured that you will be greeted with powerful grace because your Savior has promised that he will never turn his back when you come to him with a broken and contrite heart.<sup>83</sup>

Repentance is how grace flows to the humble heart (Jas 4:6). True repentance feels like God lifting the weight of conflict off one's shoulders, not psychological harm.

Whether a counselee is wrestling with gender roles, gender dysphoria, sexual immorality, or sexual identity, the root problem is a wrong view of God and a wrong view of self. The difficulty can often be not only getting one to recognize wrong views, but for the counselor to draw out those views. If a person is not careful, then he will have a belief in God but disconnect that belief from the day-to-day understanding of identity and purpose. To help counselees with that disconnect, they need a corrected understanding of God. Counselors need to discover where the wrong view of God exists and point the counselee to an accurate picture of God through Scripture. Reminding counselees of their responsibility in having faith is crucial. Yuan said of his own past struggle, "my biggest sin wasn't same-sex sexual behavior; my biggest sin was unbelief."<sup>84</sup> Regardless of the sin, students need to believe God. They need to believe what He has said about Himself, who they are, and how they should live. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6).

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<sup>82</sup> Strachan, "Transition or Transformation," 82.

<sup>83</sup> Tripp, *Sex in a Broken World*, 145.

<sup>84</sup> Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 2.

In counseling students, especially regarding deeply personal gender and sexuality issues, compassion should be a high priority. Without compassion, the counselee will certainly be unwilling to listen to truth, no matter how logical the truth may be. When reading in the Bible about how Jesus ministered, it is obvious that compassion was an essential part of His ministry (Matt 9:36; 14:14; Luke 7:13; Mark 8:2). As biblical counselors seek to display compassion, it can be done by giving a listening ear, understanding the situation from the counselee's vantagepoint, and assuring them that there is hope. There is hope because everyone is ultimately in the same condition apart from Christ and needs the same Savior. No one is beyond His reach. Yuan advises Christians to be careful of bringing up the subject of same-sex attraction if it is suspected that someone is dealing with those temptations. He writes, "How should you ask? Don't. Even if we have a desire to walk through this with our friend, we must practice patience. Sexuality is a very personal and private matter. We need to allow our friends to open up about their sexuality in their own time, not ours. But what you can do is give assurance of your friendship."<sup>85</sup> One must wonder if Yuan would give the same advice to someone suspected of being in an adulteress relationship, or a friend who might be caught up in pornography, or someone who might be sleeping with their dating partner. Same-sex attraction should not be put in a different category that is untouchable. Counselors and pastors should recognize the deeply personal nature of the sin but not avoid it altogether.

It is also necessary to help the counselee understand the difference between temptation and sinful desire. Butterfield addresses the difference:

[Desire] refers to something internal that entices a believer to want something he ought not have. Desire for evil things that is teleological is predatory and sinful—it will not be quenched until its object has been consumed. This is the kind of desire James refers to in these verses, the kind of desire that the King James Version and New American Standard Bible translate in James 1: 14–15 as lust.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 164.

<sup>86</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 72-73.

Since Scripture tells that Jesus was tempted (Luke 4:1-13; Heb 4:15), it is helpful to remind counselees that to be tempted is not sinful. However, to desire something sinful is sin. Jesus did not give in to temptation because His greatest desire was to do the will of God the Father (John 6:38).<sup>87</sup> To battle temptation, Tripp gives wise counsel that taking pleasure in God alone actually protects a person from falling for worldly pleasures and temptations.<sup>88</sup>

Yuan also advises, “Don’t compare same-sex relationships with other sins.”<sup>89</sup> It may certainly be “more productive to talk about identity,” as Yuan notes, but counselors should not completely avoid the comparisons. There are times when comparisons can be helpful. While the hardened heart of one sinner may become even more hardened by the comparison of his sin to another sin, a softened heart may be helped to recognize his own sin in a different light. For instance, what would happen if one compared the counselee’s view of himself with a person that has an eating disorder? He might see that the person with an eating disorder views life and their own identity one way, while the rest of the world sees the destruction they are causing to themselves. Biblically speaking, David’s sin and further denial in 2 Samuel 12:1-7 can be shown as an example from Nathan of how counselors may help students recognize their sin by comparison.

Compassion, however, is not isolated from biblical truth, and both are critical to the counseling process. Strachan reminds that “there was no more compassionate person than Jesus Christ, and He called sinners to break with their sin.”<sup>90</sup> Jesus demonstrated to the woman caught in adultery that there was hope for her even though she had been in sexual sin. But the hope Jesus offered was not to remain in that sin but to depart from it and “sin no more” (John 8:11). To point counselees to true hope, they need help knowing

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<sup>87</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 74.

<sup>88</sup> Tripp, *Sex in a Broken World*, 75.

<sup>89</sup> Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 167.

<sup>90</sup> Owen Strachan, “Response to Mark A. Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky,” in Beilby and Eddy, *Understanding Transgender Identities*, 133.

who they are by God's definition. Ultimately, they need to know the love of God, and their identity, which can only be truly found in Jesus Christ. Counselees then need help to recognize their own sin of turning away from God, whether it is desiring something outside of God's boundaries or by outwardly disobeying God's commands. Through an examination of scriptural truth, the biblical counselor can bring clarity to the ways the counselee has rebelled against God. Without truth, no one will come to genuine repentance. However, once they understand the depth of their sin, counselors should help them recognize how the gospel gives hope for forgiveness and change. It is in the recognition of how far humanity has fallen away from God that the cross is magnified, and God's grace is treasured.

As biblical counselors call the counselee to repentance they need to help them take the necessary steps to turn from sin and turn to Christ. Kell writes,

Too often we are tempted to keep our eyes on our sin and temptation. But if you are always thinking about yourself and your sin and how to avoid it, you will be more likely to fall back into it. Why? Because your heart is set on your sin. But if your eyes are continually upon Jesus and you think of your sin only in regard to how it can point you to Jesus, you will slowly begin to think less of your sin. Why? Because your heart is set on your Savior.<sup>91</sup>

Many times, students will know that what they are doing is sinful, yet they will not know how to turn away from it. It may be necessary to give counselees a homework assignment to aid them in taking the proper steps. As Kell explains, "Your focus will determine your affections."<sup>92</sup> A biblical counselor needs to help counselees shift their focus to Christ, which will in time stir their affections for Him instead of the world. Whether the assignment includes a Scripture passage to memorize, journaling about how they are feeling and how God's Word is speaking to them, or reading resources provided for them, these practical steps can encourage the counselee to move in the right direction of true change. They can heed the apostle Paul's words to the Philippian church, urging them to

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<sup>91</sup> Kell, *Pure in Heart*, 155.

<sup>92</sup> Kell, *Pure in Heart*, 158.

keep their focus on the Lord: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8).

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of this project was to help students and college ministry leaders grow in the biblical knowledge of gender and sexuality in order to equip students to biblically counsel one another. The development and teaching of a six-week curriculum was an important part of accomplishing the goals set forth in this project. The curriculum was presented to the students who attended the ministry of Rhody Christian Fellowship during the fall semester of 2021. This chapter will present the process used to prepare the material and gather the data, which was done to effectively evaluate if there was a change of beliefs and attitudes toward gender and sexuality, and if students felt equipped to share what they had learned with other people.

#### **Preparation of the Project**

##### **Survey and Participants**

Since the first goal of the project was to assess the current views of gender and sexuality among RCF students, a survey needed to be developed. The survey contained statements which covered specific topics related to gender and sexuality.<sup>1</sup> Those statements were worded carefully to determine what the student felt and believed, rather than merely having them communicate what they might have been taught in the past (or communicating what they might have thought I wanted to hear). Some statements were straightforward, such as, “I believe that homosexuality is sinful,” but other statements caused the student to think more deeply, such as, “A desire for a forbidden something (or someone) is okay as long as I do not act upon that desire.” Students were asked to respond to each

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 for the survey.

statement using a six-point Likert model scale. The scale measured each student's feelings and attitudes by asking for a response that best fits their view, using the following options: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat, AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree. To help students think about their answers and avoid students merely answering along a straight "agree" or "disagree" line, the statements which they would respond to were varied. One statement read, "I believe that what the Bible says about sex is relevant for today," while another read, "I don't believe that the Bible speaks to many of today's issues." The expectation would be that students would answer on the opposite ends of the scale to each of those statements.

The survey was posted to the website, SurveyMonkey.com, using a private link so that only students from RCF who were in attendance could participate. By collecting the data through SurveyMonkey and by not asking for identifying information (names, email addresses, etc.), students were able to remain anonymous. Anonymity was important to get honest feedback from students on sensitive issues. On the survey I did ask each student to indicate a five-digit code of their choosing<sup>2</sup> so that they could enter their chosen code on the pre-study survey and again on the post-study survey. The code only served to identify the results of students who completed the entire study. If a student entered the same five-digit code on both the first and second survey, then I would know that they were at least present for the beginning and end of the study. Knowing that some students would likely start and not finish the six-week study, while others may arrive in the middle of the series, the code helped keep the final results from being heavily skewed by students who only attended a small part of the series. For example, a student who only completed the last two weeks and filled out a post-study survey might not have changed their views because they lacked the foundational lessons from the first four weeks. If I did not take this into consideration, it would have been possible for the attitudes to appear to have

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<sup>2</sup> The code was optional and was not assigned, but rather chosen by the student so it did not reveal the student's identity in any way.

shifted away from the biblical views presented during the study.<sup>3</sup> SurveyMonkey.com was useful for this project because the site features the ability to download a specific QR code that would direct students straight to the survey. Before the first lesson and after the last lesson, the QR code was printed on a sheet and passed around. Using their smartphones, students scanned the QR code on the sheet of paper to take the survey.

The study was conducted during the ongoing weekly RCF ministry meeting times. Since those meetings are open to all students on the URI and CCRI campuses, it is always possible to have new students visiting for the first time on any given week. The teaching from this series was not limited only to RCF members, which is why it was helpful to identify the surveys of students who started and finished the study. I anticipated that the majority of students participating would be regular ministry attendees, but the teaching series and survey was open to any student who wanted to attend.

The teaching series was advertised by RCF on the campuses using the title “Gender, Sexuality, & The Bible.” Each week’s featured advertisement appeared on RCF social media (Instagram and Facebook), as well as through the weekly ministry announcements email (which goes to several hundred current students). We also encouraged RCF students to invite their peers through word of mouth. Since the topic of the study was a hot topic and relevant to the lives of students, it would not have been surprising to see visitors (which we did have at various times throughout the series).

## **Curriculum**

The second goal of the project was to develop a six-week curriculum to train leaders and students on biblical gender and sexuality so that students could utilize the curriculum in counseling other students.<sup>4</sup> The curriculum was developed from chapters 2

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<sup>3</sup> The most likely scenarios for students who actually attended the study would be for attitudes and beliefs to either remain unchanged or to grow toward acceptance of what was being taught during the lessons, not in the opposite direction.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 7 for lesson outlines.

and 3 of this project with the aim of giving students a biblical framework to understand gender and sexuality and to help them connect the biblical text to life situations not only for their own life but also to help others. The content was formed into six lessons, each drawing primarily from a passage of Scripture (typically covering all or most of a chapter). This approach was needed to avoid merely using a verse from one part of the Bible that could be taken out of its original context. Although the lessons addressed the topic of gender and sexuality, each lesson was intended to faithfully teach the meaning of the text.

Each of the six lessons was initially formed into outlines, and those outlines were sent to two individuals who served as the expert panel.<sup>5</sup> I chose a local pastor and an ACBC certified biblical counselor. The panel evaluated the lesson outlines and provided feedback using the rubric I sent to them.<sup>6</sup> Due to a very strict schedule that would allow me to teach all six lessons in the ideal part of the fall semester (October and November) and before the semester ended, I proceeded with the lessons once the panel members had responded and communicated that there were no significant changes needed.<sup>7</sup>

### **Teaching Series**

Week 1 of the series began with an overview study of Genesis 1-2. Since the lessons were taught during the regular weekly ministry meeting times, I taught the same lesson three times during the week (twice on Wednesday at URI, and once on Thursday at CCRI). Before the lesson began, I asked everyone to scan the QR code with their phones. Students were given approximately five minutes to take the survey, which was a sufficient amount of time. As stated on the survey introduction, no student was forced to

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<sup>5</sup> I originally hoped to receive more feedback from an additional individual, but that person was unable to review the curriculum in time for the project implementation.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 2 for evaluation rubric.

<sup>7</sup> It would have been very difficult to begin the semester in September by teaching this content since many new students are still getting settled into college life during that time. October and November provide a more established group for a college ministry. After Thanksgiving break there is a short time before final exams begin in which it would be difficult to expect consistent attendance

take the survey; it was completely voluntary. Since the survey was anonymous, students could refuse to take the survey or not complete it and there would be no way for me to know which students (if any) opted out. The weekly meeting times typically last around an hour and fifteen minutes, occasionally extending to an hour and a half. Most lessons in this series were closer to an hour and a half. The first lesson from Genesis 1-2 was chosen as the beginning to begin building the biblical framework of gender and sexuality. Both chapters were read aloud by various students. From these chapters, I highlighted the importance of the first words of Genesis, “In the beginning God created,” and emphasized that God must be the starting point for understanding not only gender and sexuality, but all of life and creation. Students were encouraged not to let their emotions and feelings be the starting point, especially regarding such a highly charged topic as we were studying. As we began, students were made aware that one of the basic presuppositions of the study would be that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. In highlighting that God must be the starting point for understanding all of life, I also pointed students to the Bible as the starting point for knowing God and His will for humanity. The passage in Genesis moreover highlighted that all human beings were made in “the image of God.” This truth is important to understand because human life does not exist for our own purpose and pleasure, but all are created to glorify God. This understanding of being made in the image of God affects how we view our gender and sexuality, and how we treat one another as fellow image bearers. Genesis 1-2 also helps us see the goodness of God’s creation. This foundational truth is crucial as we consider gender roles since those differences and roles were designed and created by God. God’s goodness in creation should be helpful to anyone who might wrongly view all sex as dirty, or to a person who claims to be transgender who might not consider their God-given body as good. By starting with God’s design and the goodness of His creation, this lesson gave a hopeful, gospel-centered outlook for the study. I did not want to come across as only attacking sins and giving a list of things not to do, which can too easily happen when teaching topically. To help students learn to counsel others,

we did talk about the necessity of a person's foundational beliefs. If a student does not believe in God, or does not believe that the Bible is true, then it is helpful to ask where their beliefs come from and how they know for sure that they are true. I encouraged the students to ask good questions and listen carefully to the answers instead of giving a pre-planned presentation that makes assumptions of what a person may believe.

Week 2 of the series covered Genesis 3. The intended takeaway for students was not only that sin came into the world and affected God's good creation, but that people are tempted even today to fall for the same lies as the first man and woman in the garden. This lesson helped students see how many of the gender and sexuality arguments today compare to the lies in the garden. The serpent's question, "Did God really say...?," seems to be prevalent today as people question whether homosexuality, for example, is truly unacceptable to God. When we can see how easily we can be deceived and how we tend to justify sin, we may be more willing to accept that feelings are leading us down the path of sin. Genesis 3 also provided a clear distinction in gender, as the consequences of the fall are different for the man and woman. Examining each of the curses God places on the man and woman are helpful to see distinctions and to understand that it was God making those distinctions (not a culture or society). To help students counsel one another utilizing Genesis 3, the big question was, "Do you believe God?" I wanted students to see how easily people fail to trust God in daily life, and they fall for the lies of the devil. As students seek to help their friends, it is crucial to recognize those temptations to twist God's words or ignore them instead of trusting Him.

The lesson from week 3 explored Romans 1.<sup>8</sup> For the sake of time, we were not able to discuss the first fifteen verses of the chapter, so I focused solely on verses 16-32. By starting with verse 16, I reminded students that no one can save themselves; it is

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<sup>8</sup> Due to a power outage because of a strong storm, we were not able to hold the study on campus as planned. We had to postpone the week 3 study until the following week. This meant that we would not hold the study in six consecutive weeks or complete the six-week study before Thanksgiving break as planned. It would need to extend into December, which was not ideal.

the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves a person. Romans 1 was chosen because the apostle Paul clearly shows how sin still affects humanity. The passage gives examples of what happens when a person rejects God and His Word, and when one refuse to give God the worship He deserves. One example the apostle Paul gives for such idolatry is homosexuality. The example of homosexuality is helpful because students may know that the Bible says it is a sin, yet they do not understand why it would be considered sinful.<sup>9</sup> Showing that people commit idolatry when they put their own thoughts, feelings, or emotions above God's design is a helpful framework to address other sins related to gender and sexuality as well. Because this passage is one of the clearest in Scripture regarding homosexuality, I took extra time to discuss that issue and answer questions and objections. For students to be acquainted with common objections to the biblical view of sexuality, particularly regarding homosexuality, it helped them to be prepared for difficult conversations as they seek to counsel peers.

Week 4 focused on Romans 3. Knowing that not all the students who attend RCF Bible studies are Christians, this lesson allowed us to build on the foundations covered from the previous three lessons and give a clear gospel presentation. Although the passage does not directly address gender or sexuality, it provides the understanding that all are sinners in need of salvation, while also presenting a message of hope by explaining what Jesus came to accomplish. I wanted students to hear from this lesson that there is hope for those who have sinned sexually, denied their God-given gender identity, committed idolatry, or tasted forbidden fruit of any kind. Such application is crucial because many students may feel that they have already gone too far, and that God no longer wants anything to do with them. Romans 3 explains that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (v. 23), but God has provided the way of redemption through Jesus. By sharing such a gospel-centered lesson, students also were reminded how the gospel

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<sup>9</sup> This lesson demonstrated why teaching in context is crucial. Many students already came into the study knowing that the Bible (some were even familiar with the specific verses in Rom 1) condemned homosexuality, yet they did not seem to make the connection to idolatry.

message fits into the previous lessons and gives hope to those they seek to counsel. This lesson provided helpful tips for communicating the gospel.

Week 5 focused on the shortest passage of the series. James 1:13-17 provided a lesson on temptation and helped us specifically deal with the topic of desires. Since many conversations are currently happening within evangelical Christianity that deal with whether certain desires (such as same-sex attraction) are sinful, this passage points to people's own responsibility for the desires within them. The "how-to" deal with those desires would be dealt with in the following lesson (week 6), but this lesson helped frame the discussion of desires in a biblical way. The study provided an opportunity to discuss the prominent question of whether a desire itself is sinful if it is not acted upon. The issue of sexual orientation was especially applicable in this category since orientation is based on desire.

While the passage from James 1 was the primary focus of this lesson, it was a short passage, which allowed us to also look at Luke 9:23-26. The topic of identity is tied closely with gender and sexuality, so I spent some time helping students see that Jesus calls people to deny themselves and follow Him. This helps to combat the prevalent ideology of embracing one's own self, even desires contrary to God's design and His expressed will. The Luke 9 passage also provided the opportunity to help students see that self-denial is the call to all people who want to follow Jesus, not merely to a limited group. This lesson was not only helpful for the RCF students in thinking about their own hearts and desires, but we also talked about how these passages could be helpful in talking with others. Needs versus desires and truth versus feelings were some highlighted areas of discussion. However, most importantly, the question of "Who am I?" brings us back to identity in Christ. Many students today are not sure who they really are, so this can be a beneficial conversation for a student to have with a friend or colleague.

The series concluded in week 6 with a study of Colossians 3:1-17. This lesson focused primarily on helping Christians live the new life that they have in Christ. The call

to put off the old self, including sexual immorality (Col 3:5), is not something unbelievers can do in their own strength. During this lesson I emphasized that unbelievers need to recognize their sin and their need for Jesus (which the previous lessons revealed) and to repent of their sin, accepting God’s gracious gift (which Rom 3 addressed). Lesson 6 was helped Christian students in the ministry to put off their own sin and live for the Lord. Though, lesson 6 also equipped and encouraged students to counsel one another as believers in Christ. Colossians 3 includes not only a personal exhortation but also a corporate encouragement to teach, admonish, and sing to one another. The study concluded by focusing on verse 17, which commands Christians to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17). This theme circles back to Genesis 1-2 and the reason why humanity was created. I also utilized this discussion to give practical helps as the students aim to counsel one another. Those helps included questions they can ask one another as they seek to know and do God’s will. A couple of sample questions were, “Does this glorify God and point others to Him?,” or “Will this cause me to love God more and stir my affections for Him?”<sup>10</sup> When applied to gender and sexuality issues, those questions can help students begin to apply the framework presented through the lessons.

These six lessons were taught during the regular weekly meeting times, and the format of the RCF ministry gatherings allows for interaction. The teacher does not merely lecture but asks provoking questions to help students see truth from the text of Scripture. Students are encouraged to ask questions as well, which provides a helpful environment to wrestle with difficult questions from their experiences and questions they encountered in talking with others. I also provided a link each week to a Google Form where they could submit anonymous questions.<sup>11</sup> Only a few questions were submitted through the

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<sup>10</sup> Many of the questions presented came directly from or were adapted from J. Garrett Kell, *Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the Promises of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Some students are hesitant to ask questions in-person, so allowing for anonymous questions provided an outlet for those who did not feel comfortable speaking up, especially regarding a sensitive topic. The form did not ask for any identifying information (names, email address, etc.). It merely said, “Enter your question related to gender & sexuality” and provided space for a paragraph or long answer text.

form, but it was helpful for those who may have been hesitant to speak up during group times.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the six lessons I was intentional about answering prominent objections to the arguments I presented from Scripture. Because I brought up the objections and sought to provide a thoughtful and clear answer to each one, this probably contributed to few questions having been submitted.

At the conclusion of the sixth lesson, students were again given the QR code to access the survey and to give feedback. The survey asked the same questions as the initial survey so that the students' responses could be compared to find out if their views had changed upon being presented with the material over the six-week series. The only addition was a space at the end that allowed for feedback.<sup>13</sup> Although it would have been helpful to ask how many of the lessons each student completed, this question was not asked on the survey to protect anonymity (since we keep attendance records for weekly events). After the last surveys were received, the results of both the pre-study survey and the post-study survey were gathered for analysis. SurveyMonkey.com provided some means of compiling the data, but since I primarily desired to compare results from students who completed both the pre-study survey and the post-study survey, I had to enter that data into a spreadsheet for analysis. With the data in hand, I looked for changes between each student's surveys, paying special attention to movement from any variety of agree to disagree or disagree to agree.

## **Follow-Up**

One of the goals of the project was to equip students to counsel one another regarding gender and sexuality related issues. The surveys conveyed the attitude and views

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<sup>12</sup> Questions that were submitted asked, "What should we do when a friend asks for us to refer to them with pronouns that do not correspond to their biological sex?," "How can we avoid using requested pronouns (that do not correspond to a person's biological sex) without destroying the relationship and coming across as hateful?," and "How should we respond to those who identify as asexual? And can a Christian enter into an asexual marriage?"

<sup>13</sup> The question was worded as follows, "Do you have any feedback, comments, helpful criticism to share with the researcher? (optional)"

of students, but did not show whether a student has a strong understanding, which would enable them to share with another person the contents of this project's lessons. To gauge the effectiveness of this aspect of the project, I conducted a short role-play interview with any students willing to participate.<sup>14</sup> This interview was completely optional, and only ten students volunteered to participate.<sup>15</sup> During the interviews, I gave each student four scenarios and asked them to respond as if they were responding to the person in the scenario. The scenarios were presented as follows:

1. Your Christian friend has been dating a guy / girl for quite a while now. It seems to be getting serious, and they have just decided to move in with each other. What would you say to her / him?
2. Your unbelieving sibling feels like she never fits in and has been dressing like a male in recent years. She now has decided (with the consultation of her health care provider) to begin taking hormones to transition. What would you say to her?
3. Your roommate professes to be a Christian, but you recently found out that he / she is in a same-sex relationship. What would you say to him / her?
4. A friend from church has admitted to you that they watch pornography on their phone. They are seeking help from you. What would you say to him / her?

The responses to the interviews were gauged using a pre-determined rubric.<sup>16</sup> After the interviews were completed, I compiled the responses for analysis.

### **Conclusion**

The project implementation went well as I could have expected. Except for the delay that occurred at week 3, the lessons went as planned. Due to the amount of content I had prepared for each lesson, most of the times went longer than I had originally intended. One student commented on the length, but most said they were grateful for the content and

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<sup>14</sup> I told each student that the interview would be around ten minutes, which was the case with most of the interviews. A couple of students gave longer, in-depth answers.

<sup>15</sup> Because the last of the six lessons was not completed until December, it became difficult to get students to set aside extra time for the interview due to final exams and preparations to leave for winter break. Therefore, I was able to conduct the interviews during winter break using Zoom, an online video communication platform.

<sup>16</sup> See appendix 3.

realized that this series was a special situation. If I were to teach this series again, I would shorten the lessons to fit within the hour. It may be possible to expand it to an extra week in the future to cover some of the material that would be cut, or to deal with additional questions or arguments.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

This chapter will evaluate the material presented and the data from the surveys. There are a variety of ways that the data could be interpreted to assist the current ministry in evaluating and equipping students regarding gender and sexuality issues, and the research could serve to help future studies as well. The purpose of this project remains on helping students see the sufficiency of Scripture to guide their lives in the areas of gender and sexuality.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The project's purpose was to help students and college ministry leaders grow in the biblical knowledge of gender and sexuality in order to equip students to biblically counsel one another. This was achieved because the project gave me a better understanding of the topic of gender and sexuality. When I entered seminary and began this project, it was because I felt unequipped to answer many of the objections from current culture that argue against biblical gender and sexuality. I thought I needed special training in psychology or experience to speak to these issues at hand. I began the project feeling as if I was not knowledgeable enough to effectively counsel students on many of the gender and sexuality issues, and I believed I was not able to speak authoritatively to some of the issues to which I did not have direct experience. I am certainly not the only person who has felt this way. Christopher Yuan addresses this issue by asking,

Since when do we have to struggle with a specific sin before we can help another with that same sin? Do I have to commit adultery before I can minister to an adulterer? Do I have to dabble in pornography before I can assist a porn addict? Do

I need to gossip before I can aid a gossip? If you know Jesus and have had some victory over sin, you can be of help to another sinner.<sup>1</sup>

This project and the related research over the past several years has given me a strong conviction that the Bible is sufficient, and Christians should be able to counsel one another from Scripture. As the apostle Paul reminded the early Christians, those who are believers are full of goodness and knowledge and “able to instruct one another” (Rom 15:14). Through this project, I ultimately gained confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture to speak to all of life’s issues, and the project has deepened my desire to know more of the Bible. Even if no one else had been impacted by this project, it was helpful for me and gave me the tools to teach and counsel students regarding gender and sexuality. But the good news is that others were impacted positively. One student’s feedback stated that the information presented in the study changed their perception “greatly” on sex, marriage, and LGBTQ issues. The overwhelming majority of students surveyed at the end of the project stated that the study was helpful, thought-provoking, and several mentioned that they had been able to pass on what they were learning to their friends.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

At the beginning of the project, three primary goals were set forth to accomplish the overall purpose. The first goal was to assess the views of gender and sexuality among RCF students. This project gave me a better idea of what the current students believe and what areas we can focus on in the future. Twenty-nine surveys were submitted in week 1, so the data is helpful for accomplishing this goal and revealing what the majority of RCF students believe. Through the surveys and discussions that happened during the Bible studies, I was able to assess the current beliefs within the RCF ministry. The introductory project surveys reinforced that the overall beliefs of the current students align with the historic Christian beliefs regarding gender and sexuality. This is displayed

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2018), 38.

from the data which indicates that all 29 survey participants agreed that the Bible is authoritative for their life (although 3 only somewhat agreed), 24 participants agreed that there are distinctions between the roles of men and women in the home and at church (while only 5 disagreed), 23 agreed that homosexuality is sinful (6 participants disagreed), and 25 disagreed that polygamy is permissible (while 4 students agreed).<sup>2</sup> Through the six discussions it became clear that the major difficulty for those who hold to those historic Christian beliefs involved being able to communicate biblical truths with others. Students did not know how to effectively convey what Scripture says about gender and sexuality in a way that is not heard or received as hateful. I hope that this study has provided a compassionate way for students to have those conversations.

Although I did not have 20 participants who completed all six weeks, 17 at least attended in the first and last weeks and chose to fill out a survey.<sup>3</sup> Only 10 students completed all six weeks of the study; 7 others completed at least five of the six lessons.<sup>4</sup> I have 19 other surveys from individuals who only completed one survey or did not have matching pin numbers to compare.<sup>5</sup> While the information from those unpaired surveys can be helpful in some ways to understand what students believe, it is unhelpful to understanding whether the project helped those students have a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality.

The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum to train leaders and students on biblical gender and sexuality so that students can utilize the curriculum in

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 4 for further data from survey 1.

<sup>3</sup> Twenty surveys would have been helpful because it would represent two-thirds of the current RCF students.

<sup>4</sup> From the weekly attendance records I could see that, from the students who attended both the first and last weeks, ten attended all six weeks, seven attended five of six weeks, and four attended four of six weeks. Of the eight students who filled out only one of the surveys, only three attended less than half of the lessons. Therefore, it is likely that the seventeen who completed both the pre- and post-surveys attended the majority of the lessons.

<sup>5</sup> Twelve of those unpaired surveys are from week 1, while seven of the unpaired surveys are from week 6.

counseling other students. The expert panel of a local pastor and an ACBC biblical counselor reviewing the curriculum outlines before the teaching began provided helpful feedback. Both gave the highest marks in the areas of consistent biblical content and the curriculum drawing attention to God and the gospel. This was encouraging since I viewed these criteria as the most important. At the initial time of review, one panel member encouraged me to “make more practical applications” throughout the study (for example, connecting how the issue of transgenderism relates to the fall of mankind). I was able to make those adjustments before starting the teaching series. The only criteria that the panel felt needed particular attention was to explore identity in Christ more thoroughly, which I was able to do in lesson 6. This goal was achieved since a curriculum was developed, and over 90 percent of the curriculum met or exceeded the sufficient level according to the expert panel. Although there are always modifications that could and should be made to strengthen the lessons, the foundation is firmly in place for an effective curriculum that can be used again.

The third goal was to equip RCF leaders and students to biblically counsel other students about gender and sexuality by utilizing what they learned from the six-week curriculum. The goal of students feeling equipped to share biblical truth with their peers, family, and others propelled the project. Several students shared that they have been able to pass on what they learned. If students feel more equipped with a biblical understanding on the topics of gender and sexuality, then the most important goal has been met. I was able to evaluate this goal through the role-play interviews that followed the six-week study. Of the ten students I interviewed, a few believed they already had a firm grasp on the subject prior to the study. The remaining students expressed they did not feel equipped to address some areas related to gender and sexuality prior to the study. Those students believed that those areas of uncertainty were addressed during at least one of the lessons and they feel more confident in addressing the issues with other people. One student specifically mentioned how helpful it was to hear objections to the biblical

perspective, and to learn how to answer those objections using Scripture. Several students shared with me that one of the most helpful lessons was to direct conversations about gender and sexuality back to the beginning of creation (Gen 1-2). One student said that prior to these lessons he would have been inclined to merely address isolated verses that relate to the subject matter (such as Rom 1:26-27 or Lev 20:13 to speak about homosexuality), rather than starting with God's design in Genesis. Hearing these and other comments gives me strong confidence that the third goal of the project has been met.

Overall, the project appeared to move students toward a more biblical view of gender and sexuality, even if it was only a small step. The measure for this goal included a pre- and post-lesson survey, and a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrating a positive, statistically significant change in attitudes between the pre- and post-lesson surveys. The *t*-test has the following result:  $t_{(16)} = -1.754, p < .0492$ . Of the seventeen students who completed both surveys, twelve moved toward an understanding and belief of what was taught in the lessons. Some of the remaining students already had strong biblical views, which remained constant. These students have likely been part of the ministry for several years or are a part of a strong Bible-teaching church that has given them a firm foundation. Only a few dissenting students remained unchanged in their beliefs or moved in the opposite direction of the study. Scripture warns of hardening one's own heart when confronted with the truth of God's Word, and this can certainly happen as some students refuse to believe what God has said.

The area that showed the largest movement was the subject of desires, which was covered in week 5. Question 8 on the survey dealt with this area: "A desire for a forbidden something (or someone) is okay as long as I don't act upon that desire." Five students (of the seventeen with comparable surveys) changed their view from some form of agreement with that statement to some form of disagreement, while at least four others changed from a lighter disagreement to "strongly disagree." Even one student, while

clearly not changing their view at all on LGBTQ issues, moved in a positive and biblical direction on at least two other areas (polygamy and desires). The study from James 1 was a strong point of this series. The other area that showed the most change is regarding whether people who feel they are the opposite gender should identify as such. This was addressed in question 9 of the survey.<sup>6</sup> Three students changed from agreeing that they should identify as a different gender than their birth sex to disagreeing. Three other students moved to a stronger belief that they should not identify as another gender but should embrace their God-given gender. This subject was also part of the lesson from week 5, which covered desires and identity. By seeing the most movement on these subjects, these numbers indicate that either this was the strongest of the six lessons, students were unfamiliar with how the biblical texts related to the subject, or they simply had not heard the passage taught from the Bible before this lesson.

The intention of this project was not only to equip students to counsel others, but to equip the RCF staff as well. During the fall semester when the lessons were being taught, we were fortunate that God brought two new staff members for the ministry. It was helpful to establish a firm foundation so that the new staff members knew clearly where we stand as a ministry on these topics. It is our hope that they also feel equipped as they counsel and disciple students on the URI and CCRI campuses.

### **Strengths of the Project**

The greatest strength of this project was its reliance on scriptural authority. Had the project been rooted in anything else, it would not have carried the authority to change hearts and minds. Reliance on the Bible also prevents the content from becoming completely outdated. With a biblical framework as the foundation, the content should be useful for students as long as gender and sexuality issues remain. Regarding the strong biblical focus, one student commented that they have never been a part of a topical study

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1 for survey questions.

that simply walked verse-by-verse through Scripture. I took that as a compliment. The strength of the project was that it was rooted in Scripture, and was gospel centered. Because of this, students can share it with others. They learned a biblical framework to use and apply to much of their life issues, not merely gender and sexuality.

Another strength of this particular study was the anonymity of the survey, which allowed the RCF ministry staff leaders to gain a better understanding of where students are in their beliefs. Students who answered that they do not believe in the authority of Scripture, or answered in a way that completely contradicted Scripture, do not always speak up during Bible studies. Their silence may lead the RCF staff to assume that they are in agreement, when in fact they are not. The survey's anonymity helped provide a better gauge of students' true viewpoints. Because of their honest feedback, RCF will know which areas need additional focus and which areas are already strong. For example, most regular attendees strongly view the Bible as authoritative (which could be because of lessons taught in the past that focused on why one should trust the Bible as God's Word) and understand pornography to be destructive (which could be from past lessons in RCF's small groups ministry). With the results of the survey showing that the overwhelming majority do trust the Bible as authoritative, and that they understand pornography to be destructive, RCF will not spend unnecessary time in the immediate future trying to convince them of these truths; whereas the question about gender being socially constructed seemed to draw some confusion. This study helps the RCF staff recognize the need for clarity in what is meant by "social construct."

One final strength from this project was the peer encouragement that took place. Many students feel hesitant to be open about their faith, specifically how it informs their views on gender and sexuality because they feel alone in those beliefs on campus. In the follow-up interview, one student who felt like they had a good understanding of the subject matter prior to the study mentioned they were most encouraged to see that others have the same convictions to hold to Scripture as authoritative. Bringing these topics to

the forefront and discussing them openly can be one way students are able to exhort one another, which Christians are called to do from Hebrews 3:13.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The biggest weakness of this project was that I never felt completely ready to begin the series. While the biblical truths are a solid foundation that can always be used to answer worldly ideologies, there are always new writings coming out with differently shaped arguments. Many of the specific arguments answered through this study will likely be irrelevant in a couple years. Because of this, I always felt like there was more to read and more arguments arising that would need to be addressed. Even while this project was underway, I heard new terminology in media and in print. For example, I was listening to a podcast that referred to “queer marriage,” which they described as two gay people of the opposite sex who marry one another but retain their gay identity.<sup>7</sup> With the constant flow of new terminology and ideas in the current cultural climate, it is impossible to cover everything within a one-hour study over six weeks. However, this does go back to the strength of the project, which is that students were given a biblical framework that they can utilize to analyze and discern new ideas as they arise.

Another weakness was that I would have loved to have gotten feedback and results from more unbelievers. The majority of students in RCF are Christians who believe solidly in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. It would have been informative to know how unbelievers would respond. To be able to ask a group of people who are not Christians if these arguments caused them to think differently about Christianity would have been insightful. This study was conducted in the fall of 2021, but prior to the COVID-19 pandemic we had a much larger ministry (including more unbelievers who participated on a fairly regular basis). Because of the restrictions on campus and the hesitancy of many students to be in close contact with others, we have seen a decline in attendance.

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<sup>7</sup> Preston Sprinkle, “Christ and Queer Marriage: Aaron and Liz Munson,” accessed January 4, 2022, <https://www.prestonsprinkle.com/theology-in-the-raw/926-aaron-and-liz-munson>.

The lower attendance and the lack of unbelievers was a weakness of the project, but even regular attendees have been affected. Student attendance is always difficult, as college students are not known for being consistent. Some attendance discrepancies were due to illness (as the university had a flu outbreak around week 3 of the study). The reasons for other attendance issues were simply unknown to me. The attendance issues unfortunately affected the project surveys. Students from week 1 took the first survey but never attended again, and students from week 6 took the last survey but were not in attendance for the foundational lessons at the beginning. Also some students attended for one or more of the lessons in the middle of the study, but were not surveyed, so it is difficult to gather the data of their views at this point.

Time constraints were another weakness. I had too much content that was not able to be sufficiently covered in the hour set aside for teaching. One student mentioned in their feedback that their biggest complaint was that I went over the allotted time on several occasions. Even with the extra few minutes, I still did not feel like I was able to communicate all that I had intended. The uniqueness of RCF's Bible study format, which allows for constant interaction and questions, made it a challenge to complete the lesson on time. It only takes one student raising a difficult question or objection, which means the teacher loses five or ten minutes. This is something that should be accounted for in extra measure with hot topics such as gender and sexuality.

One other weakness is that using a Likert model scale does not always provide complete accuracy for whether a person's mind has changed. For example, one student who completed both surveys had almost half of their answers that moved in the opposite direction than would have been intended by the study. They started in the first survey with a strong agreement that what the Bible says about sex is relevant for today, that homosexuality is sinful, etc.; yet their post-series survey indicated that they "agree" with those statements. While it would not be impossible for someone to change how they feel in that way, I noticed that in the comment field at the end of the survey they wrote that it

was a “great study” and they believed that we need to “stand firm on the Word of God” because it is “true.” Because of instances like this one, it is probably best to focus on answers that moved from any form of “disagree” (whether somewhat or strongly) to any form of “agree” (or from agreement to disagreement), rather than merely strengthening a viewpoint in either direction.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

If I were able to start again, or perhaps conduct this project in the future, the first change I would make would be to shorten the lessons. Much of the content could have been communicated in a more concise way. While I strived to address every known objection and provide as much content as possible, the studies could have been more effective by focusing on the main points. In trying to address too much content, the later parts of the lessons always felt rushed, and there were often things I was not able to say that should have been communicated. If I were to teach this series again, I would rearrange the content of each lesson to hit the main points first, address primary objections second, and then discuss some of the more intricate details if time permits.

Another change I would make would be to try to make each lesson more interactive. I felt like I was talking more than I usually do, even though I was asking questions throughout. Perhaps I would ask better questions that would engage the audience, but I believe I had prepared good questions. It seems that because we were trying to work through so much material, the study felt rushed, and therefore the students did not speak up as much as they usually do.

The time of year that the study is conducted also matters. If I had the opportunity to do the study again, I would teach the series in the spring semester rather than the fall. The fall is a difficult time to get new students connected quickly. The series could have been interesting for some, but it also could have pushed some away who do not yet have a biblical foundation. RCF focuses heavily on helping students learn and engage with the Bible. As they read and study the Bible for themselves, they learn to ask good questions

and learn the necessity of trusting God's Word. This takes time, especially for students who have not grown up in a healthy church or are not familiar with Christianity. Taking on some of the weightier matters of Scripture is generally not what we do immediately with a young or immature believer. Understanding this, the spring semester typically sees less visitors to Bible studies, so it is a more ideal time for equipping the students who attend.

Conducting the study over a six-week timeframe might be another change that I would make in the future. The value of a six-week study is that it gives time for students to reflect and grow over a period of time. They have time to wrestle with their thoughts, and there is more time for questions to arise and be answered. But the weakness of a study over a longer period of time is that every student may not attend every lesson (due to other obligations such as work schedules, additional extracurricular activities on campus, school workload, family, or even illness). It could be valuable to teach the lessons in a weekend retreat or conference format, which would ensure that most (if not all) students would be in attendance for the entirety of the series. Conducting the pre-series survey and post-series survey in a more controlled environment would be helpful. The major question would be if having so much content in a short amount of time would be too overwhelming. Students can only digest a small percentage of what they hear, so it might not be as effective as a longer study. However, while they may forget some of the smaller details throughout the series, the benefit of hearing all the lessons during a short amount of time might help them see the overall biblical framework clearly and hopefully they would remember the major points of the lessons. Similarly, conducting the role-play interviews weeks after the last study did help to reveal what information the students retained. The downside was not being able to interview a larger percentage of the participants.

The survey was also a helpful tool, but a couple of the statements were confusing to students. Therefore, I would change the wording of those statements to bring greater clarity. The most confusing question seemed to be about God wanting people to be happy. The key word in the survey was supposed to have been saying that God

“ultimately” wants us to be happy, which is not His ultimate purpose. However, some students legitimately argued that God does want people to be happy as we are satisfied in Him. This survey question could be reworded in the future to better convey the distinction implied in the original survey. The statement could read, “I believe that God isn’t as concerned about what I do (or don’t do) as He is more concerned about my personal happiness.” This statement is important because many people today believe God would not want them to remain in a marriage if they are not happy, or that God would not want them to be single and alone when they could be happy in a same-sex or unequally yoked marriage.

Another survey question that could have been better worded is, “I generally make decisions based on my feelings.” I would prefer to clarify that to, “I generally make decisions based on my feelings, even when I know that something is expressed in Scripture as sinful.” Without that clarity, many students could affirm that they make decisions based on how they feel, while still affirming that they believe in the authority of Scripture. A person could make many decisions in life based on feelings as long as they do not contradict the explicit commands expressed in the Bible. The heart of the question should have conveyed that some people navigate life based first and foremost on how they feel.

One survey question that seemed to have not been adequately covered in the teaching series was the statement that “gender is socially constructed.” The students’ answers were inconsistent, which tells me I should have addressed this more. In future studies I could bring clarity to this topic by presenting the specific arguments that present gender as a social construct, while answering those arguments with the biblical passages that address gender distinctions (such as Gen 1-3).

While the role-play interviews were helpful for me to gauge how students would counsel their peers, I did not have data to compare. Aside from my own opinion from knowing these students, there is no way that I can objectively measure growth in this area. It would have been useful to conduct similar interviews before the project

started to gather data. A pre-study interview could have also helped me identify specific areas that needed to be taught during the six-week study.

Some of the feedback I received from students after the teaching series was that there was not sufficient content about gender roles. The focus on gender after the Genesis studies tended toward only that which was related to sexuality. Students were curious about the issues of submission in marriage and women in church leadership. There was certainly an opportunity to engage with more content on gender roles, even by expanding the Colossians 3 study past verse 17 (which leads into the topic of submission). Because of this gap in the lessons that were taught, I am planning to lead students through a study of 1 Timothy in the following semester. Perhaps some of that content could be included in the future if I teach the “Gender, Sexuality, & The Bible” series again (but it would probably necessitate adding a seventh lesson).

### **Theological Reflections**

Throughout the project, I sought to stay tied to the Scripture. When I would read of an objection to the historic Christian beliefs regarding an aspect of gender and sexuality, I first looked for a response within the Bible. This approach was helpful because I was pointing to a greater authority. If teachers merely quote other people, then there is always someone who will affirm one’s own ideas, no matter how crazy those ideas may be. This study held firm to the belief that God is the ultimate authority and that He has revealed His will through the Bible. One student said that the study “presented the most serious objections fairly and answered those challenges sufficiently,” which was encouraging that students were not left wanting something more than the Bible’s answer. It is amazing how the overarching narrative of Scripture helps to bring today’s issues to light and clarify what is really going on. There are deeper issues at work. There are issues of the heart that can only be fully dealt with through the gospel and the Holy Spirit’s work.

The more one studies the Scriptures, the more easily distortions can be identified in today’s world. As stated earlier, the distortions generally fit into the same types of

categories as those in Genesis 3. This study should open the eyes of all regarding the prevalence of what the New Testament defines as false teaching (Matt 7:15; 1 John 4:1; 2 Cor 11; 2 Pet 2:1). While Christians should want to think the best of people and give them the benefit of the doubt, there is also a proper place for discernment and for warning others when something is contrary to Scripture. This is especially important with sin issues that can keep a person from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Rev 22:15). Such warnings make many gender and sexuality issues that have been explored in this project issues of first importance for the church. Without being properly addressed, the gospel is distorted. The danger of a distorted gospel is why Jude wrote in his epistle to warn the early church that some false teachers had crept in unnoticed, and that the church needed to contend for the faith (Jude 1:3-4). The false teachers must have sounded close enough to the truth that no one caught the error. This could easily be applied to today's context where some pastors and teachers talk about Jesus and quote Scripture, yet either refuse to address sexual sin or they condone it.<sup>8</sup> Jude goes on to directly connect one of the false teachings to sexuality, saying that these ungodly people “pervert the grace of our God into sensuality” (Jude 1:4) and he compares their indulgence of sexual immorality to that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 1:7).

The church needs to be equipped with God's Word, understand how to answer the modern distortions and objections, and be prepared to take a stand. Scripture tells that the time will come when people will not hear sound doctrine but will run to those who tell them what they want to hear (2 Tim 4:3). This is seen today in those who preach or teach the importance of love, but fail to properly define love and lack a call to holiness or repentance. My hope is that this project is useful to Christian ministries and the church

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<sup>8</sup> Rico Tice writes, “False teaching can look like explicitly denying scriptural truths; but more subtly, and therefore more dangerously, it can mean simply not ever mentioning some culturally or personally unpalatable scriptural truths—that is, not warning as well as teaching—not teaching the whole counsel of God.” Rico Tice, *Faithful Leaders: And the Things That Matter Most* (Epsom, Surrey, UK: Good Book, 2021), 28.

during these challenging days, helping believers “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

### **Personal Reflections**

Since beginning the journey of exploring biblical counseling and implementing in this project the principles I have learned, I better equipped to help college students as they wrestle with complicated emotions and decisions. Biblical counseling emphasizes the sufficiency of Scripture. While some issues may not be explicitly mentioned in the Bible, that does not mean that the Bible should not be the first and primary resource to address those issues.

Personally, the study has given me a greater compassion for those struggling with gender and sexuality. Knowing that many students are growing up in a world that is trying to normalize what is contrary to God’s design, this is a difficult battle. Christians must remember that everyone was once darkened in their mind (Eph 4:18), following the world, and it was the grace of God that intervened (Eph 2:1-5).

This study has also given me much more confidence in speaking the truth. Christians should not be arrogant but should be confident in knowing that God’s Word is true and speaks to anything that a person might be going through in life. As Jeremiah 17:7-8 says, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” Christians have no reason to fear if they trust in God and their roots are drawing from the living water of God’s Word. Those who trust in Jesus should not shy away from speaking about even the most controversial subjects with others. Since Christ-followers should always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that they have (1 Pet 3:15), one should be ready to share how that hope relates to gender and sexuality issues.

## **Conclusion**

The project served its intended purpose and achieved the three goals for the ministry context in which I serve, so I consider it a success overall. There is plenty of room for improvement for future teachings, but I also recognize that the small number of students who participated do not necessarily represent students in every ministry context (even college ministry context). Further research could be done in the future to analyze larger samples of data from a bigger student population on various campuses. While the study was effective and informative, even for the current ministry of Rhody Christian Fellowship, there is plenty of room for additional studies that are interrelated and could further assist a college ministry. It would be helpful to do further study to determine the primary influences of college students. Are parents, friends, college professors, the media, or the church more influential as they make decisions and form their convictions? The answer to this question could be helpful to know to give insight to further objections that need to be addressed, or additional strategies for communicating biblical truth.

## APPENDIX 1

### ASSESSMENT OF RCF STUDENTS' VIEWS ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY

The following instrument is an eighteen-question survey that assessed how RCF students view issues related to gender and sexuality, and the Bible's relevance to speak to those issues.

## GENDER & SEXUALITY SURVEY

**Agreement to Participate:** The following survey is part of a research project that is seeking to understand current attitudes and beliefs toward gender and sexuality issues. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You will be free to opt out at any point. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential, so please be completely honest. By completing this survey, you are giving the researcher permission to use your responses confidentially in a research project. In no way will you be identified or have your name mentioned.

**Directions:** Please mark your answer according to the answer that best fits your personal views and opinions. The answers are given on the following scale:  
 SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,  
 AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

- |   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I believe that the Bible is authoritative for how I should live my life.                                       | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I believe that gender is socially constructed.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I believe that ultimately God wants me to be happy.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. Sex outside of marriage is acceptable in some situations.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I believe that there are distinctions between what men and women should do (roles in the family, church, etc). | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I believe that what the Bible says about sex is relevant for today.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I believe that homosexuality is sinful.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. The purpose of sex is primarily about pleasure.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. If someone feels like they are really the opposite gender, they should identify as such.                       | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. Christianity should find a way to embrace homosexual practice.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. I generally make decisions based on my feelings.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

12. I believe that masturbation is a harmful practice.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I don't believe that the Bible speaks to many of today's issues.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. It is possible for a person to faithfully live out the Christian life as a homosexual or transgender.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. A desire for a forbidden something (or someone) is okay as long as I don't act upon that desire.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. Homosexual couples should be allowed to marry.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. Polygamy is permissible as long as all parties are in consent.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. Pornography is destructive.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 2  
CURRICULUM EVALUATION

The following rubric was used to evaluate each of the curriculum lessons. The evaluation was done by an expert panel and provided feedback to the author.

**CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC**

<b>Gender and Sexuality Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The course material is clear and easy to understand.					
The material is consistent with what the Bible teaches.					
The curriculum draws attention to God and the gospel.					
The material contains clear points of practical application.					
The curriculum is relevant for the needs of today's students.					
The material thoroughly addresses the intended topic.					

## APPENDIX 3

### ROLE PLAY EVALUATION

The following rubric was used to evaluate the students' understanding and ability to articulate what they learned from the curriculum.

## ROLE PLAY EVALUATION RUBRIC

<b>Gender and Sexuality Role Play Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Articulated a biblical view of gender.					
Articulated a biblical view of sexuality.					
Effectively utilized Scripture to discuss God's view of gender.					
Effectively utilized Scripture to discuss God's view of sexuality.					
The gospel was clear in the student's answers.					
Student was confident in their answers.					
Overall demonstrated a thorough understanding of the curriculum.					

## APPENDIX 4

### PRE-STUDY SURVEY RESULTS

The following table presents the results of the survey conducted on week 1, prior to any of the lessons.

Table A1. Week 1 gender and sexuality survey results

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat, AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree						
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. I believe that the Bible is authoritative for how I should live my life.	0	0	0	3	4	22
2. I believe that gender is socially constructed.	13	5	2	3	6	0
3. I believe that ultimately God wants me to be happy.	1	3	7	3	6	9
4. Sex outside of marriage is acceptable in some situations.	18	4	5	0	2	0
5. I believe that there are distinctions between what men and women should do (roles in the family, church, etc).	2	2	1	3	11	10
6. I believe that what the Bible says about sex is relevant for today.	0	0	2	2	9	16
7. I believe that homosexuality is sinful.	3	2	1	2	3	18
8. The purpose of sex is primarily about pleasure.	7	9	10	3	0	0
9. If someone feels like they are really the opposite gender, they should identify as such.	14	6	2	2	3	2
10. Christianity should find a way to embrace homosexual practice.	18	3	3	4	1	0
11. I generally make decisions based on my feelings.	1	7	7	10	3	1
12. I believe that masturbation is a harmful practice.	2	1	1	1	10	14
13. I don't believe that the Bible speaks to many of today's issues.	19	4	1	2	1	2
14. It is possible for a person to faithfully live out the Christian life as a homosexual or transgender.	10	8	3	3	3	2
15. A desire for a forbidden something (or someone) is okay as long as I don't act upon that desire.	9	6	6	6	2	0
16. Homosexual couples should be allowed to marry.	13	6	3	2	2	3
17. Polygamy is permissible as long as all parties are in consent.	17	7	1	3	1	0
18. Pornography is destructive.	0	1	1	0	4	23

## APPENDIX 5

### POST-STUDY SURVEY RESULTS

The following table presents the results of the survey conducted on week 6, after the completion of the lessons.

Table A2. Week 6 gender and sexuality survey results

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat, AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree						
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. I believe that the Bible is authoritative for how I should live my life.	0	0	0	1	1	22
2. I believe that gender is socially constructed.	13	1	2	4	2	2
3. I believe that ultimately God wants me to be happy.	4	2	2	4	3	9
4. Sex outside of marriage is acceptable in some situations.	19	5	0	0	0	0
5. I believe that there are distinctions between what men and women should do (roles in the family, church, etc).	0	0	2	2	2	18
6. I believe that what the Bible says about sex is relevant for today.	0	0	0	0	5	19
7. I believe that homosexuality is sinful.	2	0	1	2	4	15
8. The purpose of sex is primarily about pleasure.	12	5	5	2	0	0
9. If someone feels like they are really the opposite gender, they should identify as such.	16	4	3	0	0	1
10. Christianity should find a way to embrace homosexual practice.	17	3	2	0	1	1
11. I generally make decisions based on my feelings.	3	10	3	6	2	0
12. I believe that masturbation is a harmful practice.	0	0	2	2	4	16
13. I don't believe that the Bible speaks to many of today's issues.	17	4	0	1	0	2
14. It is possible for a person to faithfully live out the Christian life as a homosexual or transgender.	14	6	2	1	0	1
15. A desire for a forbidden something (or someone) is okay as long as I don't act upon that desire.	12	8	4	0	0	0
16. Homosexual couples should be allowed to marry.	13	5	4	0	1	1
17. Polygamy is permissible as long as all parties are in consent.	20	2	2	0	0	0
18. Pornography is destructive.	0	0	0	1	5	18

## APPENDIX 6

### PAIRED SURVEY RESULTS

The following table presents the comparative results of both surveys with pin numbers matched. The first row of numbers represents the week 1 surveys, while the second row represents the week 6 surveys.

Table A3. Paired survey results

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat, AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree						
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. I believe that the Bible is authoritative for how I should live my life.	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 1	2 0	14 16
2. I believe that gender is socially constructed.	8 9	5 1	0 1	2 2	1 2	0 2
3. I believe that ultimately God wants me to be happy.	0 3	1 1	6 1	2 3	2 2	6 7
4. Sex outside of marriage is acceptable in some situations.	10 13	3 4	4 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
5. I believe that there are distinctions between what men and women should do (roles in the family, church, etc).	1 0	1 0	0 1	2 2	5 1	8 13
6. I believe that what the Bible says about sex is relevant for today.	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 0	5 4	11 13
7. I believe that homosexuality is sinful.	2 2	1 0	1 1	1 1	2 3	10 10
8. The purpose of sex is primarily about pleasure.	6 9	5 2	4 4	2 2	0 0	0 0
9. If someone feels like they are really the opposite gender, they should identify as such.	9 11	2 3	2 2	1 0	2 0	1 1
10. Christianity should find a way to embrace homosexual practice.	12 11	1 3	1 1	2 0	1 1	0 1
11. I generally make decisions based on my feelings.	1 1	5 8	5 2	4 5	1 1	1 0
12. I believe that masturbation is a harmful practice.	1 0	0 0	1 1	1 2	4 3	10 11
13. I don't believe that the Bible speaks to many of today's issues.	11 12	3 4	0 0	1 0	1 0	1 1
14. It is possible for a person to faithfully live out the Christian life as a homosexual or transgender.	7 10	5 4	2 2	2 0	0 0	1 1
15. A desire for a forbidden something (or someone) is okay as long as I don't act upon that desire.	5 8	3 5	4 4	3 0	2 0	0 0
16. Homosexual couples should be allowed to marry.	8 9	3 3	2 3	1 0	1 1	2 1
17. Polygamy is permissible as long as all parties are in consent.	9 14	6 2	0 1	2 0	0 0	0 0
18. Pornography is destructive.	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 1	3 3	14 13

APPENDIX 7  
LESSON OUTLINES

**Lesson 1: God's Design (Gen 1-2)**

I. Sex (Gen 1)

A. “In the beginning, God...” (Gen 1:1)

1. This sets the foundation that God is the Creator, Designer, and the One who gives meaning and purpose to everything. He should be our starting point.
2. When approaching sexuality in this way, we see that the ultimate purpose of sex is the same for every part of a Christian's life, which is to glorify God.
3. Too often, an individual's understanding of sex and gender leaves the Creator God out of the equation
4. Illustration of how an artist could paint a picture that is completely misinterpreted, but if the artist explains the meaning and purpose of his painting, then it cannot be simply redefined by someone else. Sex should ultimately be defined by God and is intended to glorify Him.
5. Ignorance of God’s design, or ignoring His design, leads to a lack of peace with Him.

B. “In our image” (Gen 1:26)

1. How does man (humanity) reflect the image of God? We reflect His character (His holiness, love, grace, etc).
  - a. Being made in the image of God should change the way that we view other people, not as objects to be used for our pleasure and purposes.
  - c. Do we present God’s image when rebelling against what He has said and the boundaries that He has set (i.e. polyamorous relationships, homosexual relationships, and unmarried sexual relationships)?

C. “Male and female” (Gen 1:27)

1. Did God create humans with both male and female characteristics?
2. Unlike the animals, mankind is not separated into species, but designated by sexuality.

D. “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28)

1. Man and woman were needed to procreate and fill the earth. Neither could fill the earth without the other. Both have unique roles.
2. Was gender determined by society or by created design?
3. Sex is not a distortion of God's purposes resulting from the fall, but God's design.
4. Sex is for procreation, to fill the earth with God's image bearers.
5. But is sex only for procreation?

E. “It was very good” (Gen 1:31)

1. Our body and sex is a gift of God.
2. Not all sexual activity is good.
3. Even the distinction between male and female was called very good.
4. If we don't see God's design as good, we're ultimately saying that God Himself is not perfectly good.

II. Gender Roles (Gen 2)

A. Were there boundaries before the fall? (Gen 2:16-17)

1. Genesis 1 and 2 sets the stage for further instruction on gender roles throughout the rest of Scripture.

B. “Helper” (Gen 2:18-20)

1. A helper could not be found among the animals.
2. Gender and gender roles were designed by God, not from a social construct.
  - a. God created man first, which demonstrates an order to His creation.

3. Eve was given distinction as a woman, a counterpart to the male.
    - a. The term “helper” is used in the New Testament for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26), who is the Christian’s helper. He is not less than the person He indwells.
  4. Gender roles can be viewed in today's American society as discriminatory, oppressive to women, or even abusive.
  5. 1 Corinthians 11:3 describes the headship of the husband over the wife. Note that this cannot be fulfilled in a same-sex marriage.
- C. “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:21-23)
1. Adam did not mistake Eve for being identical to himself.
  2. There is a covenantal aspect to the phrase that is reflected in today's covenantal marriage ceremony.
- D. “One flesh” (Gen 2:24)
1. This speaks to the unifying aspect of marriage.
  2. Jesus referenced this passage in Mark 10:6-8 when discussing marriage.
  3. Human marriage is intended to reflect an aspect of God's nature, specifically that “the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4). No other relationship besides a married man and woman can have a union that reflects the union of the Trinity.
  4. God designed our bodies to unite in order to produce new life.
- E. “Man and his wife” (Gen 2:25)
1. Here they are not just called man and woman.
  2. What is the significance of “naked and not ashamed”?
  3. Just because the first marriage was between a man and a woman, does that set a pattern for everyone?

### III. Objections:

- A. “We should not be more loyal to an idea, a doctrine, or an interpretation of a Bible verse than we are to people. If the teachings of the church are harming the bodies and spirits of people, we should rethink those teachings.” (Nadia Boltz-Weber)
1. Who does this type of thought put as preeminent? People, not God. It says that we know what is best for people and what is harmful.

#### IV. Biblical counseling

- A. As you are helping others, begin and end with God and His Word.
  - 1. Make sure they have an accurate understanding of who God is.
  - 2. Makes sure they have an understanding of God's design, as described in Scripture.

#### V. Closing questions:

- A. What do we learn about God from this passage?
- B. What do we learn about us / humanity?
- C. How should we live in light of knowing this passage? What is our application?
  - 1. Look at everything through the lens of God's design and intention, as revealed in Scripture.
  - 2. See the goodness of God's design.

## Lesson 2: The Fall (Gen 3)

### I. The Serpent's Deception (Gen 3:1-5)

#### A. "Did God actually say..." (Gen 3:1)

1. Questioning God is the beginning of deception. (This is different than asking God a question and seeking His answer).
2. Many churches today are questioning if God actually said that homosexuality is a sin, or if God actually designed gender roles of men and women.
2. Do you know what God has said? And do you believe Him?

#### B. "Of any tree in the garden?" (Gen 3:1)

1. The serpent twisting God's words is an attempt to discredit God.
2. God's instructions actually emphasized their freedom and God's provision, the serpent twisted it to emphasize what was forbidden.

#### C. "Neither shall you touch it" (Gen 3:2-3)

1. This is adding to what God has said. We put our own boundaries up.
2. Eve does the same thing that the serpent did in exaggerating an aspect of God's command.

#### D. "You will not surely die" (Gen 3:4)

1. The serpent denied God's truthfulness.
2. The enemy continues to use this tactic today to deemphasize the consequences of our sin.
3. Today, countless unmarried couples deliberately cohabit together without being married, thinking that surely nothing will happen to them.
4. The more we believe that there are minimal or no consequences for our sin, the more hardened we become to the seriousness of our sin.

#### E. "You will be like God" (Gen 3:5)

1. The serpent tries to convince that people will miss out because God is withholding something good.
2. The lie is that if you experience this forbidden thing, you'll know more.
3. The serpent's desire was to get the woman to doubt God and to think that they knew better than He.
4. The deception that they would be "like God" is in direct contrast to God creating humanity in His image.

## II. Adam and Eve's Response (Gen 3:6-13)

### A. "A delight to the eyes" (Gen 3:6)

1. Sin seems enticing, and convinces that it will make us happy.
2. When we focus our eyes and attention on something forbidden, we start to desire it more. The problem is we've taken our eyes off of God, and set them on something else.

### B. "She also gave some to her husband who was with her" (Gen 3:6)

1. Adam affirmed Eve's decision by saying nothing, and then by participating directly himself.
2. By forgetting God we are overwhelmed by temptation and are unable to clearly discriminate what is sin and what is not.

### C. "And they knew they were naked" (Gen 3:7)

1. When we fall into sin, we end up at a place of guilt and shame.
2. There are consequences to our sin, both physical and spiritual.

### D. "Hid themselves from the presence of the Lord" (Gen 3:8)

1. Could they really hide from God?
2. Because we think we can hide from God, we sin privately in ways we never would if others could see us.
3. Adam and Eve should have called out to God for help, rather than hiding.
4. Hiding is always an indication that something is wrong in your heart.

### E. "God called to the man" (Gen 3:11)

1. Why the man? This points to his headship responsibility.
2. Adam was afraid of being exposed in his sin.

### F. "The woman whom you gave to be with me" (Gen 3:12-13)

1. Adam's first instinct is to shift blame to the woman, and ultimately to God, who gave him the woman.
2. Eve shifts the blame as well, only this time it's to the serpent.

## III. The Consequences (Gen 3:14-24)

### A. God curses the serpent (Gen 3:14-15)

1. The serpent is cursed above all other animals.

2. Ultimately, we see the redemption for humanity in the offspring of the woman (Jesus, the Messiah) crushing the serpent's head.

B. God curses the woman (Gen 3:16)

1. How is she cursed?

a. Her pain in childbearing will be multiplied

b. The wife will want to lead and have her way, yet the husband will be in that role.

C. God curses the man (Gen 3:17-19)

1. The man's work will be hard.

D. "God made for Adam and for his wife garments" (Gen 3:21)

1. This is a foreshadowing of God clothing believers in the righteousness of Christ

IV. Biblical counseling

A. The problem.

1. Help the person see how sin affects humanity.

2. Help them see how we tend to fall for similar lies as those from the serpent.

V. Closing questions

A. What do we learn about God from this passage?

B. What do we learn about us (humanity) from this passage?

C. How should we live in light of knowing this passage? What is our application?

1. Trust God

2. Know God's Word so that you can guard against distortions or lies.

3. If you have caved to temptation, don't try to hide. Confess your sin to God.

## Lesson 3: Romans 1

### I. Proper Perspective (Rom 1:16-17)

A. We need to remember that salvation does not come by our own works or goodness, but that it is the gospel that saves.

### II. The Wrath of God (Rom 1:18-32)

A. God hates sin.

1. The wrath of God is not just for the future / end times.
2. Is it fair that God punishes sinners? What if they don't realize what they have done?
3. Pride is at the root of why we would suppress God's truth.

B. General revelation (Rom 1:19-20)

1. No one will have the excuse in the last day that they didn't know there was a God.
2. God has also revealed Himself through His Word more specifically, since creation cannot tell us what we need to know for salvation.

C. Honor and thanks to God (Rom 1:21)

1. A lack of reverence for God and thankfulness to God leads us to resent God.
2. How does our sinful life change if we turn to worship God and give thanks to Him?
  - a. Worship of God leads to contentment and gratitude, not looking to sin for satisfaction.
  - b. Lack of honor and thanks to God leads to futility of mind and hardness of heart.
  - c. A lack of thanksgiving leads to discontentment, which can be demonstrated in being discontent with one's own body (as we see with gender dysphoria).

D. Fools who believe they are wise (Rom 1:22)

1. Much like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 thought they were going to become wise and be like God, when a person turns away from God, they turn away from truth to foolishness.
2. We see this played out today in people claiming that they are wiser than those in the past, particularly the apostle Paul, who “must not have understood sexual orientation.”

#### E. Idolatry (Rom 1:23)

1. When we put the creation above the Creator and give our hearts to mortal human beings, animals, or even inanimate objects, those things have become an idol to us.
2. When we fall into idolatry, we have forgotten that mankind was made in the image of God to reflect Him and be His representatives on the earth, and that God is supreme.
3. We can easily make relationships an idol.
4. When we don't put our trust and hope in Jesus, we will direct it elsewhere, which is going to be in unbelief and idolatry. We will exchange God for something else.

#### F. God gave them up (Rom 1:24)

1. "Therefore" - In light of what we have seen in the previous verses, we see the consequences of our choices and God's justice and righteousness in the actions that He takes.
2. "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts" – Why would God do this?
3. "To impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves" – We can dishonor God when we live in impurity with our bodies, which God made.
  - a. Sex exposes the idolatry and selfishness of our hearts as opposed to loving God.
  - b. God gives people up to their sin because it is what we deserve, and because we need to see the depth of our sin in order to see the glorious grace of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.

#### G. Truth for a lie (Rom 1:25)

1. God is true, so if we reject Him in favor of something else, we are exchanging truth for a lie.
2. If we believe wrong things about God, we will live accordingly.

#### H. Dishonorable passions (Rom 1:26-27)

1. "For this reason" points back to the idolatry that is happening. So homosexuality is shown as an example of idolatry, and it is one way that God is revealing His wrath (giving them up to themselves).
2. "Natural relations" refers to the way God designed sex to be between man and woman in marriage as the "one flesh" union.

3. “Receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error” - All of these things that God “gave them up to” are one way that “the wrath of God is revealed.” His judgment is shown by letting people do what they desire, even though it will destroy them.

I. Debased mind (Romans 1:28)

1. Continuing in a downward spiral, away from God (whom they refuse to acknowledge or believe), their minds lead them to do evil.

2. This debased mind is in contrast to the sober-minded Christian whose thinking is centered on God (1 Peter 1:13).

J. Filled with all manner of unrighteousness (Rom 1:29-31)

1. We must note that homosexuality is not listed as the worst of sinfulness.

2. The list of sin in Romans 1:29-31 should not be taken lightly. These things flow from a heart that does not love God or know Him.

K. Giving approval to sin (Romans 1:32)

2. Giving approval to others sin is the bottom of the spiral.

a. Generally, one gives approval to another's sin because they want to feel better about their own (whether it is the same sin, or another).

b. Today's culture gives approval to those who participate in virtually any kind of sexual relationship.

III. Objections

A. One argument is that homosexuality is merely a brief example, and not the point of the passage. Paul's main point is to show the sinfulness of humanity, so that we will see our need for a savior. If we dismiss the example of homosexual behavior, not seeing it as idolatrous, we would be missing the message of Romans.

B. Some argue that Paul is speaking against a man who already had a wife, but who lusted after men, was being excessive. Looking at the context, this is not the plain reading of the text.

C. Others claim that Paul was only talking about men who had sexual relationships with boys. But it is extremely important to see that Paul first mentions women, which would not fit in that category.

D. Can we just agree to disagree? This passage classifies homosexuality as a form of idolatry, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 tells us that those who persist in these sins will not inherit the kingdom. So it is a gospel issue because it can keep a person

from heaven. To neglect to warn or to even give approval leads a person to eternal condemnation.

E. Some argue that Paul didn't understand sexual orientation. Orientation involves a person's desires, which will be the focus of lesson 5.

F. One of the most popular arguments today is that if your beliefs / theology causes harm, then it is bad fruit. But our starting point must be God and His Word, not a person's feelings or experience. It is never comfortable to be confronted with our sin, regardless of what it is. But when you have tied your sin to your identity, it goes even deeper.

#### IV. Biblical counseling

A. Help the person recognize idols of the heart.

#### V. Closing Questions

A. What do we learn about God from this passage?

B. What do we learn about us (humanity) from this passage?

C. How should we live in light of knowing this passage? What is our application?

1. Believe God, worship Him and give Him thanks.

2. Recognize the power of the gospel to save and bring about lasting change.

3. Recognize the danger of where sin leads.

## Lesson 4: Romans 3

### I. Introduction

A. Illustration from The Gospel-Centered Life - We must not get bogged down by only looking at the sinfulness in us, but we have to keep growing in the knowledge of God and what He has done.

B. If pride is the cause of distorting human gender and sexuality, Romans 3 illustrates how Jesus Christ has eliminated any reason for a person to be prideful.

### II. No One Is Righteous (Rom 3:9-20)

A. Verses 9-12 – No one seeks after God on their own. We all are prone to suppress the truth about Him. No one does good in the sight of God.

B. Verse 19 - God's law keeps us from boasting, from being prideful and thinking we are righteous, because no one has kept the whole law.

C. Verse 20 - Those who have suppressed the truth (as seen in Romans 1) are confronted with their rebellion against God when they read or hear the law of God.

1. Our initial human instincts generally would not consider this confrontation to be good.

### III. God's Righteousness (Rom 3:21-31)

A. Verse 21 – It's about what God did.

B. Verse 23 - Humans were created to reflect God's glory, but we don't do that when we sin.

1. God never affirms humanity in our sin, but He shows us the depravity of our sin and offers us hope in Christ Jesus.

2. Even if we recognize in general that we are sinners, one danger could be looking only at the external actions and thinking more highly of ourselves.

C. Verse 24 – Jesus obeyed the law perfectly.

1. “gift” - We are declared right with God not by anything that we earn or work for, but by God's grace.

2. “redemption” - This is a release by payment of a ransom.

D. Verses 25-26 –

1. “propitiation” – This is an atoning sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath.

2. “by faith” - Only those who trust in Jesus / who believe Him and His words, have received the forgiveness of sin, this gift that has been offered.

3. “to show God's righteousness” - The sacrifice of Jesus showed that God is righteous.

4. A rebellion against God’s gender and sexuality standards was purchased by Jesus on the cross just as was every other sin.

5. “just and justifier” - God restrained His judgment for a time in order to show His holiness and justice (righteousness) at this time in history (at the cross), and in order that it would be shown that He is just and the one who justifies.

a. “of the one who has faith in Jesus” - Not everyone is justified (declared right with God) because of the cross.

#### E. God restores us to a right relationship to Him through faith

1. Verse 27-28 – It is only through faith that we are made right with God.

2. Verse 31 – “Do we overthrow the law by this faith?” – In other words, do we toss out the law? Why does this matter in regards to gender and sexuality?

a. What is the proper use of the law for Christians today?

i. As we read and study God’s law, it shows us our sin. We don’t rely on it to make us right with God, but it reveals the ways in which we are walking in disobedience to God.

ii. God’s law also reveals His character to us. In His law we see what it means to be holy, just, etc.

3. With a restored relationship to God through faith in Christ, a person desires to please God over themselves.

a. The sexually broken no longer are bound to continue in their sin.

b. God doesn’t just forgive. He transforms us.

#### IV. Biblical counseling

A. Christopher Yuan wisely counsels believers to respond to an inflammatory question like “Is being gay a sin?” or “Do you think gays are going to hell?” with further questions such as “How do you define sin?” and “What’s your understanding of who deserves God’s judgment?”

B. True biblical counsel provides hope because the gospel provides hope.

## V. Closing questions

- A. What do we learn about God from this passage?
- B. What do we learn about us (humanity) from this passage?
- C. How should we live in light of knowing this passage? What is our application?
  1. Do you believe that Jesus died for your sin?
  2. Find your hope in the gospel.
  3. In light of what God has done for us through Jesus, will we continue to indulge in the things for which Christ died?

## Lesson 5: Identity & Desire

### I. Scripture Passages (Luke 9:23-26, James 1:13-17)

#### A. Luke 9:23-26

1. What does Jesus mean by the command deny yourself? Why is self denial so crucial to following Jesus?

a. 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20 says, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

b. It is crucial to understand that this is the call of God on the life of every believer.

i. The insistence that Christians are forcing anyone with same-sex desires to be celibate for life is actually twisting God's Word, just as it was twisted in the garden in Genesis 3. God didn't say that they could never have sex, because He gives them the same opportunity to marry and have sex within the boundaries that He established (between one man and one woman).

c. The goal is not merely to get you to act differently, but to yield to Jesus.

2. “whoever would save his life will lose it” – The focus of gender and sexuality issues today are often focused on the here and now.

3. “gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself” – We ultimately forfeit eternal peace and life with God.

4. “whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words” – We should not neglect or be ashamed of God's Word (Scripture) because that is how we know God and the way of salvation.

B. James 1:13-17 – This passage is written in the context of what to do when you are going through difficult trials (verse 2), which can certainly apply to our topic of gender and sexuality. These issues cause great stress in some form or fashion to all of us at some point. James urges the believer to first consider how God is using the difficulties to grow you, and then James calls us to a prayer for wisdom, and to persevere in the faith.

1. Why would someone think they are tempted by God? This could apply to issues of sexuality, especially if we think that God has made us a certain way, even if He has said otherwise.

2. “lured and enticed by his own desires” - What does this passage tell us about how and why we are tempted?

3. How can we change our desires?
  - a. When we do not have a heart for God, our heart gravitates toward other things.
  - b. What about sexual orientation? Even if a desire seems natural to us, it does not make it godly, since we all have a sin nature.
4. “gives birth to sin” - Does this mean that it isn’t sin until we act on the desire?
  - a. This is a manner of debate right now among Christians. But James seems to be targeting the deeper cause which is the desire, rather than the action.
    - i. Matthew 5:21-30
    - ii. Colossians 3:5 tells us to put to death “evil desire”
  - b. Should we use the term “gay Christian”?
    - i. Christians are defined by a new identity in Christ.
5. How does verse 17 apply to our study of gender and sexuality issues?
  - a. What God gives is good, so trust Him to give good gifts (Luke 11:11-13).
  - b. God does not change (so He doesn’t change His mind and decide that something that He once hated is now good).
6. When the desires of the heart are not rooted in God and His Word, they drift toward all kinds of evil. “Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act.” (Psalm 37:4-5)

## II. Identity

- A. What is identity? It answers the question of “Who am I?”
- B. Our true identity in Christ
  1. Those who place their faith in Jesus Christ have been redeemed (Gal 4:5) and transformed into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).
- C. Given vs. constructed identity
  1. Who has God designed us to be versus an identity shaped by the world.
  2. What we do is not who we are.
  3. People can misplace identity, seeing their value in who they are in a relationship with.

#### D. Gender

1. Role and worth connection
2. Truth vs. feelings
  - a. Scripture gives us a foundation for who we are, even when we may feel something different.

#### E. Needs vs. wants/desires

1. Desires and feelings can reveal idols in our hearts as they reveal what we really value or love.
2. Is sex a “need”?

#### F. A new heart and new desires

1. If we deny that we cannot be changed, we are denying the power of the gospel and the power of God to change a person.
  - a. While the desires will not disappear overnight, they should not be embraced simply because they remain in the heart.

### III. Objections

#### A. What about eunuchs? Aren't they neither male nor female?

1. They were made eunuchs by no choice of their own, not by a subjective psychological experience, but they also were considered male. (Matthew 19)
2. “Doesn't God give us the desires of our heart?”
  - a. Psalm 37:4 says that He gives us the desires of our heart when we delight ourselves in the Lord.
3. “What about unwanted desires? Are we still responsible for those?”
  - a. “Scripture warns us against the danger of denying our guilt, even when the sin which we struggle is unasked for and unwanted. That is, Scripture warns us against pitting our point of view against God's (1 John 1:8)” (Butterfield, Openness Unhindered).
4. What could be wrong with loving someone?
  - a. Love does not lead us to do something that will go against God or separate us from God.
  - b. Love does not lead us to harm another person's relationship with God by leading them into sin.

#### IV. Biblical Counseling

- A. Change is God's gracious work in our hearts to believe Him, embrace His promises, and find our greatest satisfaction in Him.

#### V. Closing questions

- A. What do we learn about God from this passage?
- B. What do we learn about us (humanity) from this passage?
- C. How should we live in light of knowing this passage? What is our application?

## Lesson 6: Colossians 3

### I. Colossians 3:1-17

A. “If then you have been raised with Christ” – This shows us that this is instruction for the believer. It is not instruction on how to change for the unbeliever. Without the Holy Spirit, the unbeliever is powerless to effectively set aside their sin.

B. “Set your minds on things that are above” – Prioritize and value the things of God, not earthly / fleshly things. This is a good starting point for us as we battle sin and as we counsel others.

1. As we seek to help struggling believers, we need to help them uncover what might be fueling ungodly desires.

C. “For you have died...” – We have been united with Jesus in His death. So we no longer live to be who we want to be, but we live for the Lord.

D. “When Christ who is your life appears” – Sin promises what seems like an exciting and fulfilling life. So we must remember that Christ is our life, and He is coming back.

E. “Put to death...” – Sin doesn’t just go away on its own. In light of our identity in Christ, we live by faith, trusting God, believing Him that these sins are detrimental to us and to our walk with Him.

1. This verse specifically mentions not only sexual immorality, but passion and evil desire.

a. Notice the progression that Paul uses here. He starts with sexual immorality, but then he moves from the outward action deeper into the thoughts, and then even deeper into our heart motives. He gets down to covetousness, which is wanting something or someone that is not yours to have. And Paul says, that’s actually idolatry, because it is seeking satisfaction in something or someone other than God.

b. It is important to see that we cannot just deal with the surface level sin. You can tell someone not to have sex outside of marriage, but that doesn’t mean they won’t covet. So how do we put to death the deeds, the thoughts, and the heart motives?

c. The goal should be to grow closer to God, not merely getting rid of sin.

F. “the wrath of God is coming” – God will not be mocked (Galatians 6:7), we will reap what we sow.

G. “once walked” – The emphasis is that we are not who we once were. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul writes that “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.” He reminded the church of their old identity so that they would be reminded of their changed status in Christ.

H. “put on the new self” – We are not supposed to simply put off sin, but we need to replace it with something. A Christian is not someone who merely stops doing certain sins. Therefore, we are to put on the new self which lives for Christ, reflecting His image, and continues to grow in the knowledge of Him (knowing who Jesus is and how He has called us to live).

I. What do we “put on”? And how do these characteristics in verse 12 help us as we minister to one another? Notice that we are basically told to put on these characteristics of Jesus.

J. What role does forgiveness play in ministering to one another? We don’t hold past sins against one another because God has forgiven us.

K. “put on love” - If we don’t do things out of love, we are not pleasing God. And if we don’t do it out of love for our neighbor, then we’re merely giving an outward appearance of doing good.

L. The peace of God is important in ministering to one another, since conflict can easily arise. But again we see the importance of thankfulness. As we help the struggling person to learn to focus on God (verse 2), the emphasis on gratitude is helpful.

M. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” – This is essential for battling temptations, as we remember God’s word and how He has promised to help us.

1. Notice that it doesn't just produce help for us individually. When the Word dwells in us richly, we are able to instruct and correct one another with wisdom from the Scripture.

N. “teaching and admonishing” – We all need accountability. And it is each of our responsibility to help others in the church walk with Christ.

O. “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” – Our aim should be to glorify God in everything that we do. If we permit anything into our lives that cannot be associated with the name of Jesus, then we are permitting sin in our life.

P. “wives submit to your husbands...husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them” – Again this shows the difference in roles. Because of Genesis 3:16, this won’t be easy or natural, but it can be done if we put off the old self and put on Christ.

### III. Biblical counseling

A. Romans 15:14 encourages us that we are “able to instruct one another” regarding these things.

B. You don't have to struggle with or have struggled with a particular sin in order to help that person.

C. Change happens through sanctification, and involves putting off the old self and putting on Christ.

#### IV. Closing questions

- A. What do we learn about God from this passage?
- B. What do we learn about us (humanity) from this passage?
- C. How should we live in light of knowing this passage? What is our application?
  1. Set our minds on God and remember our identity in Christ.
  2. Put off the sinfulness of the flesh and put on Christ.
  3. Do everything for God's glory. Do the things that will increase your love for Him.

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO COUNSELING STUDENTS ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY AT RHODY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Matthew D. Haste

This project sought to help a college ministry in Rhode Island gain a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality, and to apply biblical counseling principles. Chapter 1 highlights the history of the ministry and the reason for the project. Chapter 2 examines the biblical foundation for gender and sexuality, giving particular attention to Genesis 1-3, as well as Romans 1. Chapter 3 provides practical application to help students with gender and sexuality issues, while also equipping them to counsel one another. Chapter 4 is an overview of the process used to implement the project, as well as the content of the teaching series. Chapter 5 includes the results and analysis of the project and its outcome.

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BS, Oklahoma State University, 2000  
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