

**What God Joins Together:  
Speaking the Truth in a World of Falsehood  
October 21 & 22, 2013  
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**Part One: Marriage as a Divine Institution**

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:18-25

The theme you have chosen for this conference, "What God Joins Together," applies to many topics of Christian doctrine. God joins together his command and promise, the Word and faith, the Word and prayer, atonement and justification, justification and faith, justification and sanctification, and we could go on and on. God joins us pastors together, not only in faith and confession as brothers in Christ, but also by a common participation in the preaching office. There may be many and various kinds of ministers, but there is only one ministry, the ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. What we call our ministries are neither ours nor ministries. They are Christ's one indivisible ministry by which sinners obtain the faith through which they are justified by God. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder. God joins pastors to congregations and congregations to pastors so that preachers can preach and hearers can hear. What a privilege it is for me to talk to brother pastors on the topic: What God Joins Together.

Christian doctrine is life itself. We don't look at the divine doctrine as the musings of pious men and intelligent men, but as the speaking of the living God. It is God's doctrine. As Jesus says, "And they shall all be taught by God." (John 6:45) But we know that some words evoke tender feelings and other words evoke discomfort and even annoyance. The word "doctrine" leaves people a bit cold. To speak of a divine institution is not to evoke feelings associated with love. This is no argument against speaking of divine doctrine and divine institutions. Rather, it is encouragement to do just that. Teachers teach, and, by the grace of God, we preachers are called by God to teach his Word to his children. In order to do that we must think and teach in terms of divine institutions.

When God joined Adam and Eve together in Paradise he established a divine institution. Some call marriage a sacrament. Granted, the word “sacrament” is not used in the Bible and its definition is a bit fluid, but it is misleading to call marriage a sacrament. I suspect that when Lutherans do so they do so because they are looking for a way to say that marriage is a holy institution. It is a holy institution. God is holy. God established marriage. Therefore, marriage is a holy institution established by God. Furthermore, our Lord Jesus sanctified marriage by doing his first miracle, revealing his glory as the only begotten Son of God, at a wedding. Jesus redeemed his bride the church with his blood on the cross and washed her in the waters of Holy Baptism, presenting her before him as radiant, without spot or blemish, holy, and blameless. There is no more holy estate than marriage.

This does not make marriage a sacrament. God established marriage before he established the Church and there can be no sacrament apart from the Church. To think that since marriage is a holy institution of God it must therefore be a sacrament may be motivated by sincere piety, but it is a misdirected and wrongheaded piety. In fact, it is an intrusion of the Church on the prerogative of the state. God established marriage in creation. This means that if we want to understand marriage, we must go back to the beginning. That’s what Jesus did when he was questioned about the permanence of marriage. He responded by appealing to history. Rome teaches that Christ the Lord raised the matrimonial covenant “to the dignity of a sacrament.” (CCC, paragraph 1601)<sup>1</sup> I would suggest that he returned it to its original and inherent dignity by grounding it in God’s creation.

If we are to understand marriage and what God joins together in this holy estate, it will be necessary for us to go back to the beginning of time, as Jesus did, because understanding history’s beginning is vital to understanding marriage. But when we approach the beginning of history, we are quite limited in our sources of information. The only historical record of the first marriage, the marriage to which our Lord himself would direct us if we wish to understand marriage in our own day, is the account written by Moses in the book of Genesis. But is it history? Does it convey historical facts? Part of the reason there is so much confusion about marriage in our day is that many Christians have lost confidence in the Holy Scriptures as the inerrant word of God. When biblical inerrancy is rejected, the historicity of the marriage to which our Lord appealed as the norm for all subsequent marriages is lost. When the historicity of Adam and Eve is lost so is a clear understanding of marriage.

The debate about biblical inerrancy is a debate about divine institutions. Inerrancy and historicity go together and divine institutions are rooted in history. When biblical inerrancy falls, the historicity of biblical events falls with it, and sacred history devolves into myth. When sacred history is myth, it becomes little more than human reflection on the divine. God’s work is rendered uncertain. Inasmuch as faith trusts in God’s work and the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P50.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P50.HTM)

Scriptures recount for us God's work in which we trust, it is impossible to separate faith from biblical history.

The argument against biblical inerrancy often relies on a caricature of our belief grounded in a false antithesis. Either (so the argument goes) we will believe in the gospel on account of our belief in the Bible or we will believe in the Bible on account of our belief in the gospel. If (so the argument continues) we believe in the gospel on account of our prior faith in the Bible the gospel becomes mere information to which we give assent on account of our prior acceptance of the Bible. Therefore (so goes the argument), to argue that biblical inerrancy and the literal historicity of every historical account in the Bible are necessary to the truth of the gospel is to denigrate the gospel itself, replacing it with a legalistic historicism. From this the argument concludes that debates about biblical inerrancy and the historicity of biblical narratives are distractions from the gospel.

This argument is smoke and mirrors. The God who in the fullness of time sent his Son to redeem those who lay under the law's curse is the Lord over time. The God who holds history in his hands is the God who provides us, in the Holy Scriptures, with an historically reliable account of what he has said and done. God's doings teach us. But it's not as if God leaves it up to us to glean from history its lessons as we look to the Bible to find tried and true principles for life. The importance of the historicity of the Holy Scriptures lies not so much in the lessons history teaches us (for we really don't need the Bible for that) as it does in confirming what God has instituted.

We Lutherans operate with an understanding of divine institutions. Whether we speak of the threefold distinction between the domestic, the civil, and the ecclesiastical estates or the two fold distinction between the kingdom of God's right hand and the kingdom of God's left hand, we believe that the God we worship and in whom we trust for everything good has established on this earth institutions through which he governs us. The establishment of these institutions is grounded in his works and words.

These institutions are grounded in divine action. When God made Adam out of the dust of the ground and formed Eve out of his rib and brought her to Adam he thereby established marriage. This is how Jesus, in Matthew 19, interprets the words of Moses recorded in Genesis 2. He said, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female?" Divine institutions are based on historical fact. God acts in space and in time and his activity has permanent ramifications for this world. A divine institution is established by God's activity.

God's institutions are based on divine commands and promises. In Genesis 1 God creates the human race in his image and creates them male and female. God's command ("be fruitful and multiply") is a promise and a blessing. He creates. Then he speaks concerning his creation. God acts and God speaks. His acting and speaking go together. He interprets what he does. But it is more than an interpretation of a past event. It is a promise and blessing on the future as well. God acts and speaks. By joining his creative activity to his

speaking he ensures, through his word, that his creation will continue throughout history. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Creation and blessing are joined together. Therefore, the blessing God spoke at the creation of the human race in his image is a blessing that continues throughout the history of the world. By the original word of blessing he continues to bless.

This is how God operates. From the beginning of time God has dealt with us within institutions that he has established for us in this world. These institutions are grounded in God's creative activity. They are defined by God's word, that is, by his command and promise. God's work and God's word concerning that work determine for us the ways God chooses to rule over us and bless us.

Let me illustrate by reference to another divine institution, the ministry of the Word. First Jesus accomplished the work. Then he spoke the word, joining the work to the word he spoke. The work was the redemption of the world. Pointing to the scars in his body he points to the historicity and facticity of his crucifixion and resurrection. More than that, he points to "the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." The work propitiates God. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's his work. His word gives to his Church and her ministers the authority to forgive sins. The ministry of reconciliation is here and now. The ministry of reconciliation is then and there. The then and there is joined to the here and now by the divine institution where God joins his work with his word. All sins were forgiven when Jesus died. And without the shedding of his blood there is no forgiveness of sins. The divine work is necessary. God forgives no one except through his word. The divine word is necessary. God does it. God speaks it. God joins his doing to his speaking and thus establishes a divine institution through which he blesses us until the end of time.

What God joins together, let not man put asunder. Consider what happens when God's doing and God's speaking are separated. What happens when we separate the authority of the office from the vicarious atonement of Jesus? We end up in some form of enthusiasm. There is the enthusiasm of sacerdotalism where the priest claims an authority above and beyond Christ's saving work. When the sacrifice of the mass propitiates God, the propitiation offered up on Calvary doesn't quite do the job anymore. Then there is the enthusiasm of Evangelicalism where the vicarious atonement is long gone and we must somehow experience the experience that will traverse time and space to get back there so that we can be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Whether the sacrifice of the mass or revivalism, we must somehow join the here and now together with the then and there because we've broken the bond that Christ already established when he instituted the ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments.

The joining of the then and there to the here and now is something only God can do. God does the creative deed. God speaks the creative word. God is in charge. When he is no longer in charge, the institution falls victim to whatever the spirit of the age requires. While we live in postmodern times where the

spirit of rationalism has given way to a spirit of subjective irrationalism, the rationalistic assault on the Holy Scriptures has done a great deal of damage to our understanding of divine institutions.

The mainline Reformed churches in the United States fought and lost the battle for the Bible during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While most Lutherans in America followed suit, Lutherans in the Missouri Synod, with the indispensable assistance of an informed laity, fought and won the battle a couple of generations later. Revisionist historians, unfamiliar with the Lutheran dogmatic tradition, have suggested that Missouri's defense of biblical inerrancy was proof of the influence of fundamentalism. This is not so. Missouri's reaffirmation of the divine authorship and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures and her rejection of the Historical Critical Method happened within a rebirth of classical Lutheranism. Far from representing a fundamentalist or Reformed intrusion into Missouri, the battle for the Bible within the Missouri Synod coincided with a revival of interest in and study of the Lutheran Confessions and the great Lutheran dogmaticians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Let me illustrate this with a personal note. On Christmas, 1973, my father gave me two books: The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel by C. F. W. Walther<sup>2</sup> and The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran Dogmaticians by Robert Preus<sup>3</sup>. It was reading Walther's book that persuaded me to study for the ministry. But I read the book by my father first. If you are familiar with the history of Missouri's battle for the Bible you will recall that the Christmas of 1973 was right during the peak of the controversy. The New Orleans convention that repudiated the teaching of the faculty majority of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis was in the summer of 1973. The walk-out of the faculty majority, followed by the formation of Seminex, which viewed itself as Concordia Seminary in Exile, took place early in the spring of 1974. As I began to read The Inspiration of Scripture, I was amazed at how relevant the writings of the seventeenth century Lutheran fathers were to the issues dividing the Missouri Synod at the time. The high view of the Scriptures that kept Missouri from following after the other large Lutheran bodies in America came from the Lutheran dogmatic tradition, not from American fundamentalism. No proper understanding of divine institutions is possible without the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

The verbal inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures are all of vital importance for us as we learn from God what is and is not a divine institution. What God permits is not necessarily what God institutes. Consider the divine institution of the ministry of the Word. Nowadays just about any kind of work having anything to do with God is a ministry to which one has a divine call. That sounds like divine institution talk, so we should expect to find something about it in the Bible, wouldn't you think? But, alas!

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<sup>2</sup> The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: Thirty Nine Evening Lectures, by C. F. W. Walther, translated by W. H. T. Dau, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1928.

<sup>3</sup> The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran Dogmaticians, Robert Preus, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1957.

The Bible says nothing of it. Bright ideas abound within the imaginations of religious people. Yes, and enthusiasm is

. . . a poison implanted and inoculated in man by the old dragon, and it is the source, strength, and power of all heresy, including that of the papacy and Mohammedanism.<sup>4</sup>

If you want to understand an institution of God you must consult God and God binds us to his external word, that is, the Holy Scriptures, and the spoken word and sacraments. What we think and feel and want may make for interesting discussions in group therapy, but have nothing to do with establishing what is and is not an institution of God.

God established marriage in creation. While Genesis 1 is not as detailed as Genesis 2, it provides the foundation for what follows. Before we are told of the relationship between Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, we are told in Genesis 1 about the blessing of marriage. Moses writes:

Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

God made them male and female in his own image, he gave them dominion over the animals, and he blessed them. The first blessing upon marriage was the blessing of children. The blessing of marriage is the blessing of children. Children belong to marriage as forgiveness belongs to the Lord's Supper. The body and blood of Jesus may make for fascinating discussion as we ponder how the real presence is tied to the incarnation and how the incarnation tells us this and that about the various mysteries of life, but until the body and blood provide us with the forgiveness of sins we haven't yet arrived at the purpose of this sacrament. We don't deny that Rome and the Orthodox have it, but we Lutherans might respectfully ask them what it is for, if not to bestow upon us the forgiveness of sins. Just so, while the union of a man and a woman in marriage is a wonderful thing and even a holy sign of something more wonderful, and the joy of that physical intimacy that entails both divine blessing and bodily pleasure is surely a wonderful gift, if there are no children, if there is no permanent fruit to this joyous union, we say that something is missing from it.

We cannot speak of the two becoming one flesh without also speaking of children. Indeed, it is the romanticizing of the man/woman love that destroys

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<sup>4</sup> Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII, paragraph 9. [The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church](#), Translated and Edited by Theodore G. Tappert, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959, page 313. All citations from the Lutheran Confessions are from the Tappert edition.

it. By making the possession and celebration of this love an end in itself the bond it presumes to exalt is broken. That's because the man and the woman do not join themselves to each other as one flesh. God does. Listen to what Jesus says about this. He says:

Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?' So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." St. Matthew 19:4-6

Since God joins them together, God also determines what marriage is and what it is for. If the man and the woman joined themselves together, they could decide for themselves what marriage is and what it is for. What marriage is and what marriage is for must be considered together. Here is how Luther puts it in the Large Catechism under the Sixth Commandment:

Significantly he established [marriage] as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for lewdness but to be true to each other, be fruitful, beget children, and support and bring them up to the glory of God.<sup>5</sup>

David Chytraeus, one of the formulators of the Formula of Concord follows and expands upon what Luther wrote in these comments on the Sixth Commandment:

Marriage is the lawful and indissoluble union of one man and one woman, divinely instituted, that we may know that God produces a chaste mind, that we may serve him in chastity, and that, with the human race being propagated in this way, the eternal Church may be gathered to God.<sup>6</sup>

Marriage is the lawful and indissoluble union of one man and one woman. This is what God instituted. He did not institute anything else. Marriage is the lawful union of one man and one woman. By lawful, we mean in accordance with civil law. If the Church were a legislative body, with the power from God to pass laws, amend laws, repeal laws, and in other ways to govern God's people by means of imposing legal requirements and restraints, we could then concede that the "lawful" in the standard definition of marriage could refer to rules and regulations of the Church. However, Christ gave to his Church no legislative authority. The keys of the kingdom are not the power to enact ecclesiastical legislation on this or that, but to open and close heaven by exercising the loosing key of the gospel for penitent sinners and the binding power of the law to the manifestly impenitent. This is a purely spiritual authority that has no coercive aspect to it. Inasmuch as a Christian marriage is consistently defined by Christian theologians, in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, as a lawful

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<sup>5</sup> Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, paragraph 207. Tappert, page 393.

<sup>6</sup> A Summary of the Christian Faith, David Chytraeus, 1568, Translated by Richard Dinda, Repristination Press, 1997, page 83.

union, and since the Church is not a legislative body, the “lawful” in the lawful union must refer to civil law.

Walther taught that the validity of a marriage depended on its conformity to civil law. In his Pastoral Theology he writes:

Before the preacher officially consecrates a marriage, he should not only be sure that he is authorized for that function according to the laws of the state but should also familiarize himself with the laws of the state in which he is. Observing them is required for a valid and legitimate marriage, and he should proceed according to them insofar as they are not contrary to God’s word.<sup>7</sup>

Walther was following Luther in this matter. As Germany was trying to extricate itself from the church/state confusion created by the pope’s intrusion into civil government’s domain, in 1530 Luther offered theological counsel to pastors on marriage matters. He wrote:

No one can deny that marriage is an external, worldly matter, like clothing and food, house and property, subject to temporal authority, as the many imperial laws enacted on the subject prove. Neither do I find any example in the New Testament where Christ or the apostles concerned themselves with such matters except where they touched upon consciences . . .<sup>8</sup>

For Luther, the authority of the Church was limited to matters of conscience. It could no more enact or dissolve a marriage than it could levy taxes or fight wars. This is not to say that the Church has nothing to say about marriage. Luther had plenty to say about it. It is rather to say that the Church did not have the right to usurp the authority God gave to the civil authorities.

Living in North Dakota, where the brand of pietism presently in currency does not yet permit homosexual unions to become publicly recognized as marriage, I can thank God that I am not like other men, living in such godless states as Iowa and Minnesota where the state’s sanctification of serial same sex sodomy is enshrined in civil law. If I were, I might be tempted to favor taking marriage out of the hands of the civil authorities since they obviously don’t know what they are doing with such authority.

This brings us into the murky waters of civil disobedience and under what circumstances it is permitted or even required. Neither Peter nor Paul, in their admonitions to submit to the civil authorities, permit disobedience on the basis of the godlessness, incompetence, corruption, or blatant unfairness of the government. It is only when the government presumes to require a Christian to act contrary to God’s word that a Christian has the right to disobey the

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<sup>7</sup> Pastoral Theology, C. F. W. Walther, Translated and Abridged by John M. Drickamer from the Fifth Edition, 1906, Lutheran News, Inc. 1995, pages 155-156.

<sup>8</sup> Luther’s Works, Robert C. Schultz, editor, Concordia Publishing House, Fortress Press, 1967, volume 46, page 265.

government. While the state of Iowa has no authority from God to regularize same sex unions as if they constituted marriages, the state's presumption in exercising illegitimate authority does not mean the state can no longer exercise legitimate authority. The Christian submits to legitimate civil authority.

Here we must be careful not to assert more than is biblically warranted. We may say that the Church has no authority to legislate. On the other hand the Church is obligated to teach what God's law says about marriage. As pastors and Americans we must resist the temptation to slide into political orthodoxy and define the relationship between the church and the state according to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Personally, I am happy to live in a country that guarantees the right to the free exercise of my religion. And the free exercise of my religion as a Lutheran minister means a reliance on the Holy Scriptures as the norm that norms all teaching in the Church and the Lutheran Confessions as the norm that is normed by the Holy Scriptures. As ministers of the Word we pledge no allegiance to any political creed. Our arguments in support of keeping the Church out of the business of legislating marital matters may jibe nicely with the First Amendment of the American Constitution, but we have theological, not political reasons for taking the stand that we take. For us, it is a matter of rightly distinguishing between law and gospel. Marriage is law. It is not gospel.

But isn't Rome right when she claims that Christ raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament? Does not the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, teach that Christ's relationship to his Church and his Church's relationship to him is that of husband to wife and wife to husband? Did not Jesus sanctify marriage is the highest estate by doing his first miracle at a wedding? Does not Jesus tell parables about marriage to illustrate the kingdom of God's grace? Surely we denigrate marriage when we argue that it is law and not gospel!

Not at all. To suggest that we do so illustrates how God's law has been denigrated among us! We define marriage as law, not gospel, because that's how God's word defines it. What God established in Creation he reaffirmed on Mt. Sinai. The purpose of the Sixth Commandment is to uphold the inherent sanctity and dignity of marriage. After observing that God's word prohibits every kind of sexual sin, Martin Chemnitz, in his *Loci*, points out that God singled out specifically the sin of adultery when he gave us the Sixth Commandment. Chemnitz writes:

There is another reason why God does not specify any other particular kind of unlawful intercourse in the Sixth Commandment but simply uses a term which signifies a violation of the conjugal union. For by prohibiting this he is showing that he is sanctifying, approving, and protecting marriage, its practice, custom, and conjugal union.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Loci Theologici*, Martin Chemnitz, 1594, translated by J. A. O. Preus, Concordia Publishing House, 1989, Volume II, page 412.

From Luther's Large Catechism, through the orthodox Lutheran fathers, through the Lutheran theologians of the old Synodical Conference, down to our own day our Lutheran tradition rightly grounds marriage in divine moral law.

The divine moral law subjects us to obedience to the positive civil law. Divine moral law is unchanging. Positive civil law is constantly changing. When the positive law corresponds more or less to the moral law it is easy to confuse the two. Our duty as preachers and teachers of God's word is to teach due submission to civil law while denying to civil law the normative function God's word gives to the moral law. This is not easy. This becomes especially challenging when the civil law becomes perverse and godless. Insofar as it is perverse and godless it has no moral authority over the Christian's conscience. But insofar as it exercises the legitimate authority that God has granted to it, the godly must submit to ungodly rulers who carry out the work of God. Here St. Paul's words in Romans 13 apply. When the godless serve God we honor God by honoring their authority.

That marriage is law and not gospel places marriage within the political arena. Moral law is more or less (and in our day, less) codified in civil law. Civil law in America entails a political process that invites participation from the citizenry. Civil law also serves as a gauge of cultural health. The cultural decline in America during the past couple of generations has been breathtakingly sharp. The America in which we live is not even recognizable as the America in which many of us grew up. Certainly, there is much that Christians can and should do in the civil arena to support and defend marriage.

Ultimately, however, a dying culture cannot bring life back to that institution within which God has entrusted new life. A culture of death that celebrates selfishness and regards children as costly commodities that get in the way of the greater good of self-fulfillment and self-enrichment cannot, by mere political means, be transformed into a life-affirming culture that values what God values. Politicking in the public square deals only with the symptoms of a decline whose cause goes back to the beginning of time.

### **Part Two: The Blessing of Children**

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."  
Genesis 1:26-28

Moses sets before us tragic contradictions. Right after the man and his wife's sin bring death to humanity, the man calls his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. The very first blessing of God on the man and the woman made in his image was the fruitful womb. The first fruit of the woman's womb grew up to murder his own brother. Irony is not the bitter

disruption of human history. It is its dull and predictable constant, as sin permeates everything good and poisons men against God's gifts. The greatest gift of marriage is the gift of children. God institutes marriage for the sake of the children and God protects marriage for the sake of the children.

The pro-abortion canard that pro-lifers care more about life in the abstract than life in the concrete has a little bit of truth to it. We affirm in our hearts that what God says is precious is precious. But we fail to recognize in the concrete day to day struggle that life can become that what God says is precious is precious even when it brings us much pain.

Children will cost you more than you can pay, disrupt your duties, your pleasures, your goals, and your dinner. They will wreck your stuff, mess up your things, keep you awake at night, and make you worry. And this is when they are all healthy, safe, and secure in your home. When they suffer from sickness; when they fall into sin; when they suffer personal failures; all of this cuts you and hurts you as what God says are blessings are also the source of pain. We see our own sins in our children, as they learn bad habits from us. The prophets and prophetesses of our day teach us to follow our hearts. I guarantee you: we will not regard children as blessings from God if we look within ourselves and listen to our hearts. One day the child will be a blessing. The next day he will be a curse. Our hearts are deceitful liars. We need to listen instead to God's word.

The Psalmist says:

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,  
The fruit of the womb is a reward.  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,  
So are the children of one's youth.  
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;  
They shall not be ashamed,  
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

Since it is God who blesses us it is God who determines what a blessing is. Wine, money, power, position – these may be blessings or they may be curses depending on how they are used or abused. Children are never curses. Children are always blessings. This is both explicit and implicit through the Holy Scriptures. The Psalmist says:

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,  
Who walks in His ways.  
When you eat the labor of your hands,  
You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.  
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine  
In the very heart of your house,  
Your children like olive plants  
All around your table.  
Behold, thus shall the man be blessed  
Who fears the LORD. (Psalm 128:1-4)

The reason that, among all of the temporal blessings in this life, children are unique in being characterized consistently as blessings is because they are not like any other temporal blessings. They are, like us, created in the image of God, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit in the waters of Holy Baptism. Their inherent dignity and value is an article of faith. We can no more prove that a human being has value because he is a human being than we can prove that a human being is made in the image of God. This is not empirically demonstrable. It is what we confess, however, in the first words of the Creed and its explanation in Luther's Small Catechism:

I believe in God the Father, almighty, maker of heaven and earth. What does this mean? I believe that God has made me.<sup>10</sup>

The God who made me is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are baptized by the authority of Jesus Christ and in baptism we put on Christ and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Christian cannot conceive of God as Father apart from his regeneration by the Holy Spirit. The creative act by which God made Adam and Eve in his own image in the beginning is still the creative act by which God makes us and our children. Christians do not see the propagation of the human race in purely mechanistic, naturalistic, biological terms. No, the God who has made me is the God who

. . . richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; . . . He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.<sup>11</sup>

We cannot separate the creative work of God in bringing new life into this world from God's fatherly care for his children. Providence is too cold a word to describe it. It is what our Father does for his children. Our Father is our Father for the sake of the vicarious obedience and suffering of his only begotten Son, our brother. Our Father is our Father on account of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit who, when we were dead in trespasses and sin, made us alive with Christ. There is no generic fatherhood of God to which we give assent and from which we deduce this and that. There is our Father in heaven to whom we pray, and in the single petition that we pray for the needs and necessities of life, we include everything needful for our children, our grandchildren, and all other children close to our hearts.

There can be no more personal issue than the issue of childbearing and childrearing. There is no greater treasure in life than the lives of our children. The reason we feel passionate about children (and the debates about abortion, birth control, and family planning reveal some of this passion) is due no doubt

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<sup>10</sup> From the Explanation to the First Article of the Creed. All citations from Luther's Small Catechism are from 1943 (slightly revised 1965) "Schwan" edition of Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

to the way that God has wired men and women. So much of the popular wisdom about marriage and children is a mishmash of truth and fiction, wisdom and folly. Romantic stories, songs, poems, plays, movies, and truisms abound. Every once in a while the wisdom of the world brings sanity and even a bit of illumination on the subject. When it comes to marriage and children, Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The Female of the Species," is brilliant in its analysis of how and why the female of the species is deadlier than the male. Survival depends upon it. George Gilder's 1973 book, Sexual Suicide, republished as Men and Marriage in 1986, remains one of the most brilliant treatments of the feminist assault against motherhood. What God reveals in Holy Scripture about the fruit of children being the first and primary blessing of marriage is confirmed by natural law and this law is affirmed by the wisdom of the ages. The nature of marriage as the lifelong legally binding union of one man with one woman who are faithfully devoted to each other is closely related to procreation as the primary benefit of marriage.

To say that the primary benefit of marriage is children is not to deny that marriage is marriage when not blessed with children. We are talking about a general principle, not an irresistible law that applies to every specific marriage. God only knows why he chooses to bless this marriage with many children while he withholds the blessing from others. That being childless was a reproach in biblical times is clear from the examples of Sarah, Hannah, Elizabeth, and others. God blesses this marriage with children. He withholds that blessing from that marriage. Why? This is God's business, not ours. We may rejoice and we may mourn and nobody can deny that it affects us deeply. But that does not give us the right to speculate about God's will for us or to pry into his hidden will and construct a theory about why he does what he does and doesn't do what he doesn't do. That would be presumptuous. What do we know about God that he has not revealed to us in his written Word? We do know that God chooses to withhold the fruit of the womb. After Leah had her fourth son, Judah, Rachel, who had no children, was overcome with envy against her and said to her husband, Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." Jacob responded in righteous anger against Rachel's presumption that family planning is a human prerogative and said to her: "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Genesis 30:1-2) God opens the womb and God closes the womb and God knows why.

That barrenness is no longer the social stigma it was in biblical times is not because people have become more sensitive to the pain of barren women – as a matter of fact, they have not – but because children are no longer valued as they once were. Replacing theology with sociology and interpreting the Holy Scriptures sociologically will yield whatever conclusion you want it to yield. It's no surprise that subjecting the sacred text to the canons of the social sciences has yielded the "insight" that for people of biblical times an agrarian economy coupled with an arid climate made the reproduction of children an economic necessity. In our less labor intensive economy with the high cost of childbearing and childrearing with experts telling us how many hundreds of thousands of dollars a child will cost to raise, the reproduction of children is an economic liability.

Subordinating the biblical text to the so called social sciences leads to bad theology. The Holy Scriptures are prescriptively normative. Sociology is descriptively normative. Human nature being what it is, what is descriptively normative is regarded as prescriptively normative. Call it the herd instinct. People don't actually think it through. They just follow the crowd. On the matter of the blessing of children and the attendant issues of birth control and family planning, what is normative descriptively – that is, what is going on – becomes normative prescriptively. Everybody's doing it. This is the twenty first century. Get with it. Any comment (usually this doesn't rise to the level of an argument) that appeals to the way things are for the way things ought to be is an argument that the descriptive reflects the prescriptive. This represents the triumph of the social sciences over theology in the interpretation of the Scriptures and in the faith and piety of the people. Demographic statistics such as birth rates, population density, economic growth, and so forth are gathered together in service to whatever theological agenda one has.

You can see the intrusion of the social sciences in the debates about birth control and family planning in the Missouri Synod during the twentieth century. Two influential Missouri Synod theologians will illustrate this for us. In 1934, Walter A. Maier's book, For Better, Not for Worse, presented the traditional Lutheran argument against birth control. In 1959, Alfred Rehwinkel's book, Planned Parenthood and Birth Control in Light of Christian Ethics, broke with tradition and argued in favor of birth control. Alfred Rehwinkel was no liberal. He had established his conservative bona fides several years earlier with his book, The Flood: In Light of the Bible, Geology, and Archaeology. Rehwinkel never wavered from his devotion to the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. But both Maier and Rehwinkel relied heavily on the social sciences in their arguments for their respective positions. Reading these books in the twenty first century illustrates for us how fleeting are the results of such scholarship. It becomes passé very quickly.

Particularly ironic today are the arguments from the sixties that warned us of a population bomb that would explode in the seventies. A man by the name of Paul Ehrlich wrote a book by that name that sold millions. Now we witness the demographic crisis facing those countries that refused to reproduce. Throughout Europe we are see the heirs of a Christian culture who no longer confess the Christian religion trying to come to grips with the religious demands of Muslims they imported to do the work the children they never had were not there to do. The Canadian government bribes Canadians to have more children. Were it not for immigration, both legal and illegal, the United States would be facing similar challenges. Whether family planning is scriptural or not, after two generations on the pill we learn that family planners really had no idea what they were doing or what their plans would yield. We Christians must extricate ourselves from the intrusion of the social sciences upon the theological task and approach the matter of motherhood, children, birth control, and family planning from the Scriptures as the sole source and norm of all doctrine and practice in the Church. Today's truth among social scientists will be tomorrow's quaint notion. Today's dogma will be discussed tomorrow prefaced by the comments, "Remember when people thought that . . ."

We do not need to demonstrate that children are blessings from God by pointing to the social cost of planned barrenness or to the social benefit of large families. I can share anecdotes and stories that might illustrate some of the blessings of growing up in a large family and raising many children. My parents had ten children. My wife and I were blessed with twelve children. My children are having children, and it looks like we'll have thirty grandchildren by springtime. While I might persuade you, if you need any persuading, that I am blessed, you will also, as good Lutheran pastors, refuse to extrapolate theological truth from one man's experience. After all, should a sincere Pentecostal share with you how speaking in tongues has drawn him closer to God I don't think this would persuade you to promote tongues speaking in your congregation as a sign of a Spirit-filled victorious life. Personal experience does not constitute a theological argument nor can it do anything more than to confirm what the Holy Scriptures already clearly teach.

So we don't prove that children are a blessing by pointing to how God has blessed us through our children. Still, I'll admit that I would like to make it personal and point out how God has blessed me. While this might not persuade, it could possibly encourage. Have you ever talked to a frustrated brother pastor who can't understand why, when he works so hard to prepare biblical, edifying, clear, law/gospel sermons and does his best to conduct the Divine Service with reverence, choosing good soul-strengthening hymns, he sees so many parishioners skip church for no good reason. If the word of God is inherently efficacious, why can't I see it? If God's word has power to do what God wants it to do, why isn't God doing what he wants to do? Be patient. Take to heart the words of the Psalmist:

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
And in His word I do hope.  
My soul waits for the Lord  
More than those who watch for the morning—  
Yes, more than those who watch for the morning. (Psalm 130:5-6)

Sometimes God lets you see. Sometimes he keeps you blind. He is in charge. When we are dealing with an article of faith we do not depend on what we see. It is an article of faith that children are a blessing from God. Faith lives on God's word. We don't believe because we see. We believe in order to see as Augustine reminds us. Grounding faith in what is visible to our eyes deprives faith of its source and strength. Once faith is severed from its source and strength in the word of God, enthusiasm takes the place of faith.

Let's talk about family planning, contraception, and birth control. Let us do so as Lutherans, committed to a catechetical pattern of thought. Think catechetically. Thinking catechetically, where would you place the topic we are discussing? Where does this matter of birth control fit? For Rome, it falls squarely under the Sixth Commandment because it's all about sex. Here is how it is stated in a Roman Catholic college textbook on moral theology written back in the fifties: "The Sixth Commandment prescribes that sex pleasure in human beings be directed toward the orderly propagation of the race." This principle is taught in the Papal Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, produced by Pope

Paul VI in 1968. According to the pope, “each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life.”<sup>12</sup> There is an inseparable connection between the unitive and the procreative. In other words, there can be no artificial barrier placed between sexual intercourse and conception. Hence, the pope’s opposition to contraception.

Did you hear the one about the pious Catholic lady who, with seven or eight rambunctious children running around her home, decided to practice birth control? One of her friends asked her if she wasn’t familiar with what the pope and the magisterium of the Church said about that. She replied, “You don’t pay the game, you don’t make the rules.” There is some misunderstanding among us Lutherans and others about the pope’s rules. Contrary to popular opinion, the pope does not oppose birth control. In fact, the Encyclical, *Of Human Life*, endorses family planning. It reads:

With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time.<sup>13</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church teaches family planning. You may decide to have more children. You may decide not to have more children. You decide. It is your decision to make. Just make sure that you follow the rules. The rules do not prohibit birth control. Indeed, it is assumed that you will practice birth control.

Rome argues from the Sixth Commandment and subsumes the matter of birth control under it. Since sexual intercourse and procreation belong together by nature, it is a sin to place an artificial barrier between the two. It is not a sin for a married couple to avoid sexual intercourse during that time of the month when the woman is most likely to conceive a child. This would not violate natural law. Artificial methods of birth control such as sterilization, condoms, diaphragms, birth control pills, and above all, abortion, are sins.

I don’t know that we need to spend much time talking about abortion or contraceptives that are or may be abortifacients. The killing of unborn children is no one’s right. It is wrong. The feminist argument for reproductive rights is an argument against nature. Sexual intercourse and the conception of a child go together. Humanly speaking, they are cause and effect. To argue that a woman has the right to have sexual intercourse without conceiving a child and should she nevertheless conceive a child she has the right to have that child killed is not just demeaning to the woman who claims such a right – treating her as a whore – it is an assault on humanity as it justifies the killing of the weakest and most vulnerable among us. The assault against the unborn in America is a twofold attack on human dignity. It is an assault on motherhood and it is an attack on human life. It is an assault on motherhood, not just

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<sup>12</sup> *Humanae Vitae* paragraph 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Humanae Vitae* paragraph 10.

verbally, but literally, in the deliberate killing of the fruit of her womb. It is an attack on human life in general.

To claim the right to kill unborn human beings for no other reason than that we don't want to take care of them is to claim that our wants supersede another human being's right to live. When the right to choose an abortion trumps the right of the unborn to live, the natural law has been repudiated. That's what has happened in America. The American civil religion had assumed that civil rights were grounded in the law of nature and nature's God. This has not been the case for quite some time. Civil law is a teacher. The status quo in America is that a woman has a legal right to an abortion. This right is incompatible with the existence of a Creator to whom the civil authorities are accountable. While we pastors are primarily concerned with what God gives us to do within our teaching office as we teach what God's word says to God's children, we must also deal with the fact that the people entrusted to our spiritual care are being taught the law by the civil authorities. Now, more than ever, we need to be countercultural in our preaching and teaching. The collapse of the natural law foundation for civil law in America has not only caused political and cultural decline, but has also influenced Christians' beliefs about God's law. While we must sharply distinguish between the civil and spiritual authorities, we cannot entirely separate them. Furthermore, our parishioners do not always distinguish between civil law and divine law. While the prophetic nature of the pastoral office requires us to be countercultural in our preaching, a love for our neighbors – in particular, our unborn neighbors who have no civil right to live in America – should prompt us to defend what is left of Christendom in our dying American culture. As Professor Kurt Marquart used to say, we oppose legal abortion, not because it is a sin against God, but because it is a crime against humanity. On this, natural law is crystal clear.

For many Christians, including many Roman Catholics, the Roman Catholic teaching on natural law as it prohibits contraception is not so clear. The relationship between sexual intercourse and procreation is clear. But if we are to concede that it is the business of the married couple to plan out if and when they will have children, it is rather difficult to find the less effective rhythm method acceptable while regarding more effective condoms as sinful. I confess not to know much about condoms. I've been told that they inhibit sexual pleasure. I don't doubt it. I've also been told that God made the woman the most amorous at that time of the month when she is also the most fertile. That's not surprising, either. So it would appear that whether you use a condom or follow the rhythm method you are in either case taking away a bit of the pleasure that God in his wisdom put into it. Why anyone would want to do such a thing is beyond me! That the one way of preventing conception is categorically different than the other way of preventing conception is, I submit, an argument that evades a larger and more pressing issue: where do we get the right to plan the birth of children?

Obviously, matters pertaining to sexual activity fall under the Sixth Commandment. Just as obviously, the question of whether a married couple will have children has something to do with their sexual activity. We all know where babies come from. But there is more to it than that. The matter of

family planning or birth control is not primarily a Sixth Commandment issue. It is a First Article issue. Our heavenly Father blesses us with children. This is an article of faith. God chooses to use sexual intercourse between a man and a woman as the means by which he will bring children into this world. This is true. But it is not necessarily so. Adam and Eve did not come into this world as a result of sexual activity. Our Lord Jesus did not come into this world as a result of sexual activity. God created Adam in his own image. Jesus is the image of God. As we sing: "Praise to thee and adoration, blessed Jesus, Son of God, who to serve thine own creation, didst partake of flesh and blood." Sexual intimacy is the means God has chosen to bring new life into this world, but it is not the efficient cause. It is merely the instrumental cause. God's will and choice to create a child is the efficient cause.

The minister does not effect faith in those who hear his words. God does. God works faith where and when he pleases in those who hear the gospel. What a joy and privilege it is to participate with God in the salvation of souls. St. Paul tells Timothy that if he continues in teaching the saving doctrine he will save himself and those who hear him. 1 Timothy 4:16 He is speaking according to a figure of speech known as a metonymy. He won't save anybody. The divine doctrine will. Christ is the Savior. Christ saved us by dying on the cross for our sins and rising from the dead. Christ saves us in the here and now by means of the gospel that Timothy and all other Christian preachers preach. Paul encourages Timothy to continue in the doctrine that saves. By doing so, God, not Timothy, will save sinners from hell.

It is a high and holy privilege to preach the gospel by which God regenerates the spiritually dead and saves them. We would not dream of pointing to the preacher's personal charm, giftedness, eloquence, or some other innate quality as the catalyst that energizes the gospel and makes it work. That would make the preacher rather than the Holy Spirit the cause of conversion. Just because God chooses to use the agency of a minister to regenerate a sinner doesn't mean that the minister did the regenerating. Nevertheless, God has joined regeneration to the external word that is ordinarily proclaimed by the minister that God calls to preach it. What God has joined together, let no one put asunder. But no preacher regenerates anyone. The gospel is the power. Not the preacher.

Just so, God blesses marriage. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply." The divine blessing of Adam and Eve in Paradise at the beginning of time is the divine blessing until the end of time of the conjugal union between a husband and wife as the means by which God will bring children into this world. Addressing the Roman Catholic requirement of priestly celibacy in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article XXIII), Melancthon refers to Rome's argument that the command of Genesis 1:28 to replenish the earth no longer applied because the earth had been replenished. He refutes Rome's argument by pointing to the fact of marital desire. God gave this desire. The continued desire of a man for a woman and a woman for a man means that God still commands marriage and still blesses marriage with children. As long as

human nature remains how God created it, so long the command to be fruitful will endure.<sup>14</sup>

We do not argue from human participation to human control. Human participation is a privilege and a joy. There is no greater joy in life than preaching the gospel to sinners whom God forgives and comforts and saves. We claim no credit. We rejoice in the privilege of participating in such a wonderful event. Just so, the joy of the marriage bed is a privilege that God in his love gives to us to enjoy. That this may be the means by which God brings new life into this world does not make us the authors of life. Husbands and wives don't make babies any more than preachers make Christians. But we parents and pastors are given the joyful task of serving as God's instruments in blessing us with life, both temporal and eternal.

Some folks don't want to go to church. I don't understand. It must be the way you are raised. When I once suggested to my father that I didn't have to go to church if I didn't want to (I was about sixteen years old at the time) he agreed with me and told me that he didn't have to give me food to eat if he didn't want to. Thinking it through, I decided that I wanted to go to church. So I advocate bringing children (even sixteen year old children) to church whether they want to go or not. Just do it.

On the other hand, while you can bring a horse to water, you cannot make him drink. If the person in the pew doesn't want God's gifts there's not a whole lot you can do about it. You preach the benefits of the Lord's Supper. You cannot require attendance. God's gifts cannot be imposed against one's will. A gift is accepted in faith and gratitude.

So it is with children. They are gifts from God. This is what we should teach. We should reject materialistic calculations that measure a child by how much money he will cost. We should reject selfish assessments that treat children as impediments to our autonomy, or our standard of living, or our quality of life. Children do not diminish our lives. They enrich us. They provide us with a wealth that no amount of money can buy. The notion that children are a burden to be avoided is grounded in a hedonistic, self-centered, and ultimately vain system of values that will leave its devotees empty, bitter, and all alone.

If a married couple does not believe that children are gifts from God, I see little point in guilting them out of practicing birth control. If a married couple does believe that children are gifts from God there can still arise circumstances when the health and wellbeing of the mother would be jeopardized by having more children. There is no rulebook to consult. There is what we call sanctified common sense. A husband will protect his wife from harm. That's his duty.

For many Christian couples, the decision to practice birth control is not made out of concern for the health and safety of the mother, but out of a fear of losing something. Cultural mores that combine the dehumanizing values inherent in feminism and materialism promise women liberation from their wombs while

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<sup>14</sup> Tappert, page 240.

enslaving them to a fruitless search for what just isn't there. More and more stuff just leaves her emptier and emptier. Grasping for what is out there blinds her to what is closest to her heart. The greatest honor ever bestowed upon a woman as a woman was bestowed upon Mary when she became a mother. She became the mother of God. Christian women become mothers of God's children. From Mary giving birth to Jesus, all Christian motherhood is sanctified. A culture that denigrates motherhood in the name of women's rights is promoting a lie. Women are not men. God made a woman to be different than a man. Even a woman who does not marry or if she marries has no children is nevertheless geared as a woman to those things that pertain to the care and nurture of children.

We aren't going to preserve the dignity of Christian motherhood by setting up a hedge of rules on birth control and family planning. The default position of most Christian couples is that they will plan if and when they will have children. I would suggest that in the context of such humanistic hubris it would be a waste of time to come up with a list of rules. Instead, we should attack the culture of planned barrenness at its root, extolling the blessing of children, and confessing that it is a divine, not a human, prerogative to bring human beings into this world. If we condemn synergism in the Third Article of the Creed, confessing that we cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to him, let us condemn synergism in the First Article of the Creed as well, confessing that when children are conceived and born this is the will and work of God. There is no such thing as an unplanned pregnancy. God is the Author of life. It is he who has made us and not we ourselves.

**Part III: What God Has Joined Together  
Let Not Man Put Asunder  
Chastity, Adultery, and Divorce**

Winston Churchill was probably best known for the inspiring leadership he gave to the people of Great Britain during the war against Hitler. He was a gifted speaker. It was said that he could speak extemporaneously and authoritatively on any topic. In fact, it was a kind of game when he was serving as Prime Minister that another member of the House of Commons would call on him to speak on a topic. Churchill would stand up and talk and talk. One day he was asked to talk about sex. Churchill stood up and addressed the members of the House: "Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure . . ." Then he sat down. I would suggest to you that Churchill, in that succinct and pithy speech, covered a good bit of the ground set before us as we continue our discussion of what God joins together.

Sexual intimacy gives pleasure. Thank God. God joins sexual pleasure to the marriage bed. What God has joined together, let no one put asunder. God joins his doing to his speaking, establishing a divine institution. God joins marriage to children, blessing marriage with children and children with marriage. God joins sexual intimacy to marriage. This is God's good and creative act. It is not his grudging acquiescence to lust-driven creatures that are going to copulate anyway but need to be kept within certain boundaries.

Sexual pleasure is not a necessary evil. It is a positive good. It belongs to marriage, brings joy to marriage, and can be understood rightly only as a confirmation of the love that God has placed in marriage.

God smiles on the marriage bed. Solomon writes:

Drink water from your own cistern,  
 And running water from your own well.  
 Should your fountains be dispersed abroad,  
 Streams of water in the streets?  
 Let them be only your own,  
 And not for strangers with you.  
 Let your fountain be blessed,  
 And rejoice with the wife of your youth.  
 As a loving deer and a graceful doe,  
 Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;  
 And always be enraptured with her love.  
 For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman,  
 And be embraced in the arms of a seductress? (Proverbs 5:15-20)

The joys of marital intimacy were established by God in creation before the fall when everything he had made was very good. Sexual pleasure existed before there was sinful lust. A man who rejoices in his wife's body and a woman who rejoices in her husband's body rejoice in God's gifts that God gives in love to his children. God blessed them and told them to be fruitful. That is to say, God blessed them and told them to enjoy the sexual bodily intimacy that brings pleasure. That pleasure is God's good creation.

When I teach the catechumens the Ten Commandments I will make a list of the gifts that God in love gives to us and that his commandments are designed to protect. I ask the class to match the gift with the commandment God gives to protect it. The gifts that God in love wants to protect and the commandments that protect them are, in order: the Fourth Commandment protects the family; the Fifth Commandment protects the body; the Sixth Commandment protects marriage; the Seventh Commandment protects property; the Eighth Commandment protects our reputation.

The Sixth Commandment protects marriage. That it is marriage that is being guarded and defended is made clear both by Luther in the Large Catechism and by Chemnitz in his Loci. Luther writes:

Inasmuch as this commandment is concerned specifically with the estate of marriage and gives occasion to speak of it, let us carefully note, first, how God highly honors and glorifies the married life, sanctioning and protecting it by his commandment.<sup>15</sup>

Chemnitz addresses the significance of the word "adultery" in the Sixth Commandment. Speaking of the prohibition of adultery, he writes:

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<sup>15</sup> Tappert, page 393.

For by prohibiting this He is showing that He is sanctifying, approving, and protecting marriage, its practice, custom, and conjugal union. God with His own finger willed in the Decalogue that this word should prohibit the violation of lawful marriage in opposition to the teaching of demons who condemn the institution of marriage. For He is showing that He is not only the author but also the defender of marriage.<sup>16</sup>

The prohibition of adultery is divine approval of marriage. The word “adultery” focuses specifically on marriage. What is being adulterated by means of promiscuous sexual behavior? It is marriage.

The Sixth Commandment entails more than adultery narrowly considered. In his *Loci*, Chemnitz lists the virtues required by the Sixth Commandment as modesty, chastity, continence, a sense of shame, temperance, and sobriety.<sup>17</sup> David Chytraeus, in his *A Summary of the Christian Faith*, lists three virtues that fall under the Sixth Commandment: chastity, modesty, and moderation.<sup>18</sup> Luther, in the *Large Catechism*, while noting that the Sixth Commandment forbids specifically adultery, applies it to every form of unchastity.<sup>19</sup>

Fornication refers to sexual intercourse with one to whom one is not married. Adultery refers to sexual intercourse with someone other than one’s own spouse or to someone who is married to another. In every case, fornication or adultery is a sin against the neighbor. It is a sin against the neighbor with whom one participates in the sin. It is a sin against the neighbor whose marriage is being violated. While fornication has a certain social respectability that adultery does not have, fornication is sin against a future husband or wife of either party.

Nowadays there is much talk about sexuality. I’m not sure what it means. A dictionary definition is “the sexual habits and desires of a person.” Each person has his own sexuality. This one’s sexuality leads him to habitual fornication with members of the opposite sex. That one’s sexuality leads him to serial sodomy with members of the same sex. The other one’s sexuality requires a sex change operation to as ensure that his sexuality is firmly under his, and no one else’s control. It is not a sin to pervert God’s design or to toss out his institution or to break his law, for if anyone thinks he knows of such things he certainly has no right to impose that on anyone else as normative. The sin is to deny to the individual the autonomy to determine his or her own sexuality.

This differs from ancient worship of Baal and Asherah. Those religions incorporated sexual immorality as a feature of worship. But it was worship of entities outside of the worshippers themselves. True, Baal and Asherah were idols. But there was at least the form of devotion to someone else, even if that someone was a dumb idol carved out of wood or stone. Today’s religion of

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<sup>16</sup> *Loci*, page 412.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Chytraeus, page 82.

<sup>19</sup> Tappert, page 392.

autonomous sexuality is essentially narcissistic. To pleasure oneself is one's unalienable right, as long as no one else is being coerced into activity against his will.

They called it free love in the sixties. This doctrine of sexual permissiveness has been analyzed from various points of view. The increase in venereal disease led to a strange new term: "safe sex." There's an irony for you! When sexual intimacy is enjoyed in the marriage bed between a husband and wife who are devoted to one another in lifelong fidelity it is a time and place of safety, security, belonging, and sharing. When sexual intimacy is used as a means of self-gratification with a willing partner who may be infected with a terrible disease, the sex act becomes a risk. An act that God designed as an expression of love between a man and a woman united as one flesh for as long as they both shall live has become a potentially lethal assault from a sexual partner who just might be a deadly enemy.

Yes, and they think that they're enjoying themselves! What could be better than this? It's almost as fun as drinking yourself into oblivion and then throwing up in the toilet!

The issue of physical health is minor compared to the spiritual destruction that sex outside of marriage brings upon those who participate in it. Their lives are cheapened by being cut off from the Source of true and eternal life. We need to address this theologically so as to see its root error.

The fundamental error of those who sever sex from marriage and teach that sexual intimacy may rightly be enjoyed outside of the marital union is that they deny the essential goodness of sexual intimacy by putting asunder what God, in the beginning, joined together.

They accuse Christians of what they themselves do. They accuse us of taking the joy and the pleasure out of sex, confining it within our religious restrictions, and making what is beautiful dirty. But this is precisely wrong. It is when sexual intimacy is ripped away from the place where God has placed its true enjoyment and fulfillment that what is beautiful becomes dirty and what brings joy brings fear and pain.

The very idea of regulating sex is repugnant to those who think that sexual fulfillment requires following one's own desires on the matter. For them it stands to reason that doing what you want to do must be the right thing to do especially when the purpose is to enjoy the doing of it. How can stifling bodily pleasure bring bodily pleasure?

To which the Christian is wont to reply: Bodily pleasure is not all there is to it! And then we've lost the argument. We've conceded to them that we are compromising what Sir Winston called the "great pleasure," of sex for a greater good, presumably the orderly propagation of the human race.

This is not true. The regulation of sex within the marriage bond makes it much more pleasurable than the promiscuous abuse of this gift outside of marriage.

When my son Christian was five years old he could beat adults at chess. He was amazing! Of course, he played adults who were unfamiliar with the game. And he cheated. He was quite sincere in his cheating. He reasoned that if a pawn can move diagonally to capture an opponent's piece it stood to reason that a pawn could move diagonally at any time. Well, actually, he has been taught otherwise, but he found that he would win more games if the pawn could go where he wanted it to go. When friends of ours commented to us on how clever our son Christian was at chess, we would smile and say: "Yes, he's very good. And he cheats."

Finally, Christian decided that it was more fun to play chess within the rules of the game. So he did. I started playing him by spotting him a queen, then just a rook, and finally with no spot at all. When he was ten or twelve he could beat me regularly without cheating. The moral of the story is that it's more fun to follow the rules of the game than to cheat!

I have a serious point to make here. The joys of sex are lost when sex is set loose from its mooring in God's word. Consider St. Paul's discussion of the marital duties in 1 Corinthians 7. The apostle writes:

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1 Corinthians 7:3-4)

Sexual intimacy entails duty. To whom? To the other! Imagine that! The joys you want in sex, the pleasure you derive from sex, is not yours for the taking. It is yours for the giving. You don't have authority over your own body. The one to whom God has joined you in marriage does. Many promote sexual freedom (that is, promiscuity) as a feature of the sexual liberation of women. But in fact, the woman's sexual equality with the man exists only within the bond of marriage as that bond is regulated by the word of God. Listen to how St. John Chrysostom explains these verses. First, he quotes St. Paul and then he comments:

"The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband" (v. 3). And what are conjugal rights? First, it means that the wife has no power over her own body, but she is her husband's slave – and also his ruler. If you refuse to serve your husband properly, you offend God. So, wife, if you want to abstain, even for a little while, get your husband's permission first. This is why St. Paul speaks of conjugal rights as a debt; to show that neither the husband nor wife is his or her own master, but rather are each other's servants. As for you, husband, if a prostitute tries to seduce you, tell her, "My body is not my own, but my wife's." And let the wife say the same to any man attempting to undermine her fidelity: "My body is not my own, but my husband's." So if neither husband nor wife has power over their own bodies, they have even less control over money. Listen carefully, all

married men and women: if you cannot call your body your own, then you certainly cannot call your money your own. Now I admit that elsewhere in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments, men are given far greater authority: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you,” or, “Husbands, love your wives . . . and let the wife see that she respects her husband;” notice Paul’s choice of words. In this passage, however, there is no mention of greater or lesser authority. Why does he speak here in terms of equality? Because his subject is conjugal fidelity. He intends for the husband to have the greater responsibility in nearly every concern, but fidelity is an exception. “The husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.” Husband and wife are equally responsible for the honor of the marriage bed.<sup>20</sup>

Years ago, I was visiting with a couple who kind of wanted to get married. Well she did, anyway. He was willing to go along with it, but didn’t see any real point. They had been living together for a year or so. She felt guilty about it and he was unrepentant. I asked him why he thought that they should be living together before getting married. He responded with a question. “How else can you know if you’re sexually compatible?” I responded to his question with my own. “Do you think that if both the man and the woman try to please the other and bring joy to the other that that might make them sexually compatible?” He thought about it and agreed that it probably would. The reason I still remember this exchange (that happened about thirty years ago) is that it was perfectly obvious to me that the man had never considered that the biblical Christian teaching about sex and marriage would promote sexual pleasure. He assumed the teaching of the Bible and of the Church was sexually repressive. He had bought into the lie of our culture.

Vulnerable individuals seeking commitment from other vulnerable individuals, not knowing who to trust and so trusting no one, wondering if their performance or bodily attributes measure up against the performance and attributes of other sexual partners. Ah, the joys of unfettered sexual expression! In fact, the promise of sexual fulfillment outside of the bonds of marriage and outside of the parameters set down in the Holy Scriptures was one big lie.

The denigration of the biblical teaching on sex and marriage has degraded women. Breaking the bond that God has made between sexual intimacy and marriage prepares women for exploitation as sexual objects for the pleasure of men. Whether in the explosion of the pornography industry or in the more respectable forms of entertainment where casual sex is expected and condoned, women are always the losers. It is truly an irony that the modern feminist movement, in the name of women’s rights, trashes the traditional Christian teaching on marriage. Nothing is more degrading, demeaning, and damaging to women than the social acceptance of sex outside of marriage.

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<sup>20</sup> St. John Chrysostom: On Marriage and Family Life, translated by Catharine P. Roth and David Anderson, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1986, pages 26-27.

Here is where we need to teach our people, especially young people whose urges are most urgent, that they are being lied to. The dangers of sex outside of marriage are not primarily the dangers of disease that can be avoided by practicing safe sex. The dangers of sex outside of marriage are not primarily the danger of having a child you aren't prepared to care for. The real danger of having sex outside of marriage is the danger of being severed from the God who joined sexual intimacy to marriage.

This is a major cause of the falling away of young folks from the Church. The reason they quit going to church is not because the church isn't offering them worship styles in tune with their musical tastes. It's not because the church isn't offering them opportunities for interaction with other young people with whom they can share life experiences. None of the pop-sociological diagnoses of the apostasy of the younger generation from Christianity confronts the real issue. The young people who turn their backs on the church have become devotees of another religion. They don't come to church because they have rejected the God we worship. They don't want him. They don't want his judgment and they don't want his forgiveness. They have a new god and they believe that what this new god promises is a better deal for them than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians need to understand that sexual sins are idolatrous in nature. That God made us male and female and geared the sexual desire to serve his own procreative purpose does not mean that sexual pleasure is significant only as it serves the procreation of children. But it does mean that to put asunder the bond God has established between sexual activity and marriage is to sever oneself from God the Creator, and to be lost in a self-centered, materialistic spiritual void.

Shame is cruel. Nobody wants to feel it. But shame is a very effective teacher. We pastors know something about shame and sexual immorality. We know that there is precious little shame left. It no longer serves as a deterrent. Nowadays "good girls" do it. We may know better. But they don't. They need to learn. They won't learn from the culture. They won't learn from the school. Sometimes they won't even learn from Mom and Dad. We preachers must preach against fornication and call it what it is and show how it is incompatible with the Christian faith.

What does the Bible say? Here is what St. Paul has to say in 1 Corinthians 5:

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

What does this say about admitting to the Lord's Supper couples who are living together and enjoying the marriage bed without first getting married to each

other? Is that not fornication? If marriage is a public and legal act, is it possible for a couple to refuse the public and legal marriage and still be married in the sight of God? Who decides what God says about it if not God himself? St. Paul writes in the next chapter of this Epistle:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The sin of fornication is not the unforgivable sin. All sin is covered by the blood of Jesus. There is no sin he did not bear. There is nothing lacking in his obedience. By the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous. Not by the obedience of any other, but by the obedience of the One, namely Christ. This righteousness is what covers us and makes us radiant in the sight of God. And this righteousness, reckoned to the whole world by the death and resurrection of God's Son, is ours only through faith in this Redeemer. Faith is born out of contrition. Even as the good soil in which the seed grows and bears fruit is the soil that has been plowed, just so the heart that embraces the forgiveness of sins and rejoices in it is the heart that has been condemned. Vapid, non-specific, generalities about our sinful condition is not exactly the kind of law preaching the doctor ordered. If we are to be physicians of the souls entrusted to our care we will carefully instruct our people that if you really and truly love each other and are really and truly devoted to one another and join together in sexual union without first getting married, you are committing fornication and no fornicator will enter the kingdom of God. Fornication as an act is idolatry. This is why it was associated with idolatry in ancient times. It still is.

When I served a congregation in Racine, Wisconsin, I would occasionally visit a local store run by a Palestinian Muslim from Jerusalem by the name of Mike Musaitef. We used to discuss and argue theology. One day when we were visiting he started blasting away at Catholic priests in general on account of a sex scandal involving Catholic priests that had been in the news. Mike took a very strong stand against adultery and he wanted me to know it. I told him I shared his views and he should come to church on Sunday. I would be preaching against divorce. He looked at me in surprise and replied, "But there is nothing wrong with divorce."

Jesus condemns divorce in no uncertain terms. Jesus appeals to the Creator and his creation. He says:

"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?' So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. St. Matthew 19:4-6

Divorce is not an option because a man has no authority to sever a bond that God has made. Marriage is a divine institution. This is not just a fancy term for something to which we want to provide a bit of religious dressing. It is a reference to God's activity, activity that God requires us to acknowledge and respect. When a couple gets married, while they are making the promise, they are speaking the words, they are voluntarily giving their assent to this union, it is God, not they, who is actually joining them together as one flesh. This is what Jesus says. He says, "What God has joined together, let not man separate."

When his disciples questioned him by referring to the Law of Moses, Jesus appealed to the beginning, to the work and word of God, to the divine institution. And he joined together divorce and adultery, saying:

And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. St. Matthew 19:9

Jesus did not make this up. The Word made flesh bound himself by the written word. The prophet Malachi gave God's view of divorce. In Malachi 2:13-16 the prophet records these words from God:

And this is the second thing you do:  
 You cover the altar of the LORD with tears,  
 With weeping and crying;  
 So He does not regard the offering anymore,  
 Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.  
 Yet you say, "For what reason?"  
 Because the LORD has been witness  
 Between you and the wife of your youth,  
 With whom you have dealt treacherously;  
 Yet she is your companion  
 And your wife by covenant.  
 But did He not make them one,  
 Having a remnant of the Spirit?  
 And why one?  
 He seeks godly offspring.  
 Therefore take heed to your spirit,  
 And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

"For the LORD God of Israel says  
 That He hates divorce,  
 For it covers one's garment with violence,"  
 Says the LORD of hosts.  
 "Therefore take heed to your spirit,  
 That you do not deal treacherously."

Divorce is treacherous. It is violent. It is immoral. It is sin. Why does God hate divorce? Because he loves children. As the prophet writes, “He seeks godly offspring.” Divorce tears apart a bond that God himself established for the sake of the children.

It seems that the church lurches from legalism to permissiveness back to legalism with the regularity of the ticking of a clock. Often legalism and permissiveness combine, as in our day when we are sternly warned not to preach too sternly against divorce because some of our parishioners are, you guessed it, divorced, and what we say will upset them. I remember getting a kindly and rather patronizing lecture about this, years ago when the son of a man who had had a divorce in his youth and still suffered feelings of guilt for it told me that I had exacerbated his father’s feelings of guilt.

We cannot comfort sinners with the law. No, divorce is not the unforgivable sin. But it is sin. It does harm. God hates it. The only reason he permits (though he doesn’t require) divorce on the grounds of adultery or fornication is because, even as sexual intercourse between husband and wife consummates the marriage, so the act of sexual intercourse with someone else is a physical repudiation of the marriage. When Rome denies the Sacrament to Roman Catholics who obtain divorces from unfaithful spouses she places her claim to authority above the permanent and binding authority of the Son of God who said, “except for sexual immorality.” A Christian is not bound in marriage to a spouse who breaks the marriage vow by sexual infidelity. I have witnessed marriages that survived even adultery, when the guilty party confessed the sin and was absolved by God and the spouse. The forgiveness of sins is a powerful thing, healing broken relationships. But we have no right to require a Christian to remain married to a husband or wife who commits fornication.

Something we should address before leaving the topic of divorce is the matter of divorced pastors. I am happy to say that I know nothing about any divorced pastors in the Iowa East District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Sometimes ignorance is helpful. It helps me to speak candidly. Clearly, we distinguish between divorce obtained without grounds and divorce obtained with grounds. There is no place for the “a plague on both your houses” amorality of the superciliously judgmental among us. God doesn’t require that you stay married to someone who is cheating on you. God doesn’t require it of pastors any more than he does of the laity. We must not impose rules that God’s word does not impose.

On the other hand, the qualifications of a bishop, that he “be blameless, the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2) is a requirement that has direct bearing on the Church’s teaching about marriage. The minister of Christ serves the Church as a representative of Christ. The notion that Jesus would or could divorce his bride is unthinkable. Being a bit old fashioned and maybe old Missourian, I prefer the portrayal of the pastor as a minister of the word to his portrayal as the icon of Christ. But the two need not be mutually exclusive, and as the representative of Christ the minister teaches also by his life. Appearances matter.

We need to distinguish between being forgiven of our sins and being blameless in the biblical sense of the word. I am not anxious to issue prescriptions, but rather to ask questions. If a minister of the word has had an unscriptural divorce and repents of his sin, we do not question that God forgives him his sin. But the blamelessness required of a pastor is not to be justified by God, but by men. Can a man who has had an unscriptural divorce meet the qualifications set down in 1 Timothy 3 and again in Titus 1? A man who has had a divorce, either by his wife against his will or by him because of his wife's infidelity, is not to blame for his wife's unfaithfulness and surely isn't expected to remain married to her, especially if she does not want to be married to him, but if he chooses to remain in the ministry, should he also choose to remain unmarried? I am just asking. I don't want to judge a brother pastor. This is a very personal issue, and perhaps for that reason it is seldom broached. While we must all be concerned for brother pastors who are suffering hurt because of a failed marriage and we would not want to compound that hurt by a judgmental spirit against them, we also need to keep in mind that our Lord's clear words prohibiting divorce are not a legalistic burden upon us, but a divine defense of marriage as a holy and inviolate union of one man and one woman as long as they both shall live. It is out of pure love that Jesus said, "What God has joined together, let no one put asunder." His ministers must teach this by both word and deed.

#### **Part IV: Homosexuality**

In preparing for this conference, knowing that I had five sessions in which to present, I debated devoting an entire session to the topic of homosexuality. Why should I? The Scriptures are so clear on the matter that it seems like a waste of time to do more than to cite the written Word of God that condemns homosexuality as a sin, speak of repentance and forgiveness, and move on to something else. Besides, does not nature itself tell us that homosexuality is a perversion of God's creation? Why spend time on it?

There are a number of reasons for doing so. First, there is the obvious fact that the social acceptance of homosexuality in recent years has had a tremendous impact on the church at large, especially in denominations particularly sensitive to societal norms. We need to confront the fact that many nominal Christians have abandoned the Christian teaching on a fundamental issue of what makes us men and women.

Second, the rejection of the Church's teaching on homosexuality is also a rejection of natural law. The natural law is written on men's hearts as their conscience. How do we deal with a generation of people that has been bullied by powerful propaganda into rejecting what nature itself teaches? What happens to every day morality when the natural law foundation has been lost?

Third, the homosexual rights movement is utterly incompatible with the gospel itself. The gospel is food for the soul only for those who are hungry. As Luther says, "Hunger is the best cook." The so called "gay rights" agenda is the homosexual's mortal enemy because it is only through the forgiveness of sins that God freely bestows for the sake of Christ's vicarious obedience and

suffering that any sinner can be delivered from the guilt and power of his sin. Those who claim to champion the cause of homosexuals teach homosexuals that their homosexuality is not inherently sinful and that there is no need to repent of it. They thus consign them to impenitence and damnation.

Fourth, contrary to popular opinion, proponents of homosexuality and the acceptance of homosexuality are not antinomians. They just have different laws. They adhere to them rigidly and they apply their laws against Christianity. Often in the name of Christianity they condemn Christianity. We need to understand their laws in order to refute them.

Much of mainline Christianity has rejected what the Bible teaches about homosexuality, adopting, in its place, the presently fashionable teaching of the social sciences. As we have seen, the dogma of the social sciences changes with the ideological seasons. Popular opinion, often molded by political activism, affects the professional classes who determine what the orthodoxy of the social sciences will be. Naturally, a social or psychological explanation of a phenomenon such as homosexuality will not permit itself to be guided by divine wisdom, inasmuch as the truth of the God who speaks authoritatively on matters pertaining to human nature and conduct is entirely outside of the purview of psychoanalysis.

For years, the American Psychiatric Association identified homosexuality as a mental disorder. In 1973 it removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Claiming new empirical data, it was in response to increased political pressure from the budding but already influential homosexual rights movement. Churches sensitive to the influence of fashionable opinion, soon adopted new approaches to the biblical texts that condemned homosexuality.

The sin of the men of Sodom who wanted to have carnal knowledge of angels was not their homosexual lust but their inhospitality toward strangers. Anything in the Mosaic Law condemning homosexuality could be dismissed as a part of an obsolete civil code. In Leviticus 18:22 we read that it is an abomination for a man to lie with a man and for a woman to lie with a woman. In Leviticus 20:13 the penalty for such an act is death. No one disputes that homosexuality was a violation of Mosaic Law and that death was the punishment for this violation. It is simply dismissed as inapplicable to the permanent moral law. That the Old Testament civil law was grounded in the unchanging moral law is not considered.

But what about the teaching of the New Testament? Surely, the words of Romans chapter one are clear enough. We read:

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. Romans 1:26-27

It is painful to read efforts to explain away the plain meaning of these words. Those with an agenda to get rid of biblical condemnations of homosexuality will argue that the manner of behavior described here was temple prostitution, or pedophilia, or some kind of exploitative sexual activity, but cannot be applied to the sexual activity of a monogamous same-sex couple devoted to one another. With similar arguments they dismiss St. Paul's condemnation of sodomites in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

Let's be honest about this. Those who have been advancing these creative exegetical gymnastics to evade the clear teaching of the biblical text reject the Bible as the inerrant word of God. To pretend that the Bible could mean something it obviously doesn't mean does no one any good. It is game playing. But the game is played to deceive the minds of the simple who still believe the Bible is God's word and still belong to church bodies that don't. Those who long ago abandoned the Scriptures as the only source, rule, and norm of doctrine for the Church must nevertheless make a pro forma biblical case for their unbiblical teaching.

What replaces the Bible as the standard when the Bible is no longer regarded as God's infallible word and the sole norm by which we judge all teachers and teachings in the Church? The social sciences? Not really. They are just the dressing in which the new standard is clothed. They give it respectability. The new standard is human desire. What I feel is what is good. It is good because I feel it.

As radical as this notion sounds, there is a little bit of truth to it. Not much, but a little. The homosexual rights movement argues from their feeling to their nature. They are "gay" they say. They define "gay" as same sex attraction. Since this is what they feel this is what they are and since this is what they are this is how they identify themselves. You may not deny them this self-identification without denying them their humanity. You are taking away from them their human rights if you if you deny to them the fulfillment of their desires.

Compare this to Melanchthon's argument in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. He also argues from human desire. He argues from the desire of a man for a woman and a woman for a man to the right for them to marry. We read in Apology, Article XXIII:

Genesis 1:28 teaches that men were created to be fruitful and that one sex should have a proper desire for the other. We are not talking about sinful lust but about so-called "natural love," the desire which was meant to be in uncorrupted nature. This love of one sex for the other is truly a divine ordinance. Since this ordinance of God cannot be suspended without an extraordinary work of God, it follows that neither regulation nor vows can abolish the right to contract marriage. (Apology XXIII, par 7)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Tappert, page 240.

The homosexual rights movement argues from homosexual desire to homosexual rights. Melancthon argues from heterosexual desire to heterosexual rights. What is the difference? God! God is the difference. In the case of homosexual desire, God says it is an abomination. In the case of heterosexual desire, God says it is very good.

The reason why homosexual marriage is impossible is because God cannot join a man to a man. A man can join himself to a man. God can't. He cannot do so because he cannot act against his own nature. If God cannot join a man to a man then there can be no such thing as homosexual marriage. When a man joins himself to a man he denies God's nature and his own.

Here is where feelings are very deceptive. When it comes to concupiscence, that is, the constant inclination to do evil, we Lutherans are fully aware of the fact that it is sin. Here is what Jesus says about it:

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. (St. Matthew 15:19)

In a Christian, who lives under grace, concupiscence is forgiven. It is forgiven through faith and a Christian lives by faith. It is forgiven for the sake of the merits and mediation of Jesus. But if it is to be forgiven, it must be sin. If it is simply the way God made the man then God can hardly forgive what he himself did. Only sin can be forgiven.

Here the natural law serves the conscience well. The conscience feels sinful homosexual lust. He knows there is something wrong with the way he feels. Still, he will always be able to excuse his feelings, as long as he doesn't act on them. Then God's law as revealed in the Holy Scriptures tells him it is also a sin to lust for what is evil. God's law won't let him off the hook. He knows that the desire for what is sin is sin.

Modern liberal theology, with its adoption of evolution has tossed aside natural law. Roman Catholic theology denies that concupiscence in a Christian is a sin. A significant portion of the Roman Catholic priesthood is oriented toward homosexuality, but, since they have taken the vows of celibacy and are presumably following them, their homosexuality is not a sin they must confess and for which they must seek forgiveness.

Natural law teaches us morality from nature. It is very down to earth. It need not be so refined and highly developed as Rome makes it. It is essentially very simple. This does not go there. This is not an entrance, but an exit. An act that cannot ever bring life which can only bring death is wrong. Natural law is brutally clear. Someone once said: God always forgives; man sometime forgives; nature never forgives. Silencing natural law is silencing the most readily accessible law we have.

The biblical teaching on concupiscence is that it is sin. The desire to sin is sin. The rejection of both natural law and the biblical teaching on concupiscence make for a deadly spiritual combination for the homosexual. Rome's denial

that concupiscence is sin is an essential part of her synergistic doctrine of justification. After all, if sinful lust is sin, justification as the internal transformation of a sinner into a saint is no longer viable. Even when Rome's doctrine of justification is not adopted, at least not formally, her teaching on lust is shared by many outside of the Roman Catholic Church. It is not uncommon for relatively conservative Christians, even some Lutherans, to argue that homosexuality as an orientation is not sinful as long as the homosexual does not act on it. You may be "gay" and you may so identify yourself because, after all, you can't help that. But you may not engage in homosexual activities.

This puts the Christian who is afflicted with homosexual desires out in the cold, in a spiritual no man's land from which he cannot escape. He has a desire that is not exactly sin but it certainly is not right, either. He may not act on it, but what is he supposed to do with it? He can't do anything with it. He can't even confess it to God and seek forgiveness for it if it isn't a sin for which God condemns him. But he cannot fulfill this desire in what he does. How bitter must be the words of the hymn, "Hast thou not seen, how thy desires all have been, granted in what he ordaineth?" But God has ordained nothing for the homosexual to fulfill his homosexual desires. That is because those desires did not come from God.

It is a sentimental notion of love that would have us back away from the biblical condemnation of homosexual desires. The inspired text from Romans says that God gave them up to vile passions. They burned in their lust. This is not adequately described by calling it an orientation or an attraction or a condition. This is begging the question that must be confronted. Is it a sin to be a homosexual? The Bible says so. Faithful ministers must say so. God does not and cannot affirm a homosexual in his homosexuality. But God can and does forgive homosexuals!

This is what we must say and we must be crystal clear about it. The love that will not call sin sin will not direct the sinner to the wounds of the Savior, but will appeal instead to a bloodless grace of an indulgent god who says nothing that faith can grasp. God's grace in Christ required real obedience, real blood, real suffering and death as the one Man became the Mediator between God and man. In his holy body he bore the sin of every homosexual abomination ever perpetrated against his divine majesty. He felt the guilt and the shame of it. He suffered its consequences. He died for homosexual sin. There is no trace of homosexual guilt that Jesus didn't bear and wash away from this fallen world by his blood. In him, in his suffering, all homosexual feelings, desires, and deeds are forgiven. The anger that God, by his very nature as God, directs against homosexuals – all homosexuals everywhere – was quenched by the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus who is the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He says, "Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Those who would provide homosexuals rest in the law by changing it so that it no longer condemns them deny Christ, rendering his vicarious suffering

unnecessary, not only for the homosexual, but for the murderer, the thief, the liar, and every other sinner who wants to do what God forbids him to do.

The proponents of homosexual marriage are determined to remove from homosexuality any stigma that it has suffered so that the difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals is morally neutral. They have at their disposal many in government, in mainline churches, and especially in the popular culture. Television, movies, and popular music are filled with pro-homosexual propaganda that is, at its root, severely anti-Christian.

Consider these lyrics from a popular song called "Same Love," that features a rap monologue by a homosexual man interspersed with a sung refrain by a homosexual woman:

The right-wing conservatives think it's a decision  
 And you can be cured with some treatment and religion  
 Man-made, rewiring of a pre-disposition  
 Playing God  
 Ahh now, here we go  
 America the brave  
 Still fears, what, we don't know  
 And God loves all His children  
 Is somehow forgotten  
 But we paraphrase a book written  
 35 hundred years ago

And I can't change  
 Even if I tried  
 Even if I wanted to  
 And I can't change  
 Even if I tried  
 Even if I wanted to  
 My love, my love, my love  
 She keeps me warm

When I was in church  
 They taught me something else  
 If you preach hate at the service  
 Those words aren't anointed  
 And that Holy Water  
 That you soak in  
 Is then poisoned  
 Kids are walkin' around the hallway  
 Plagued by pain in their heart  
 A world so hateful  
 Someone would rather die  
 Than be who they are  
 And a certificate on paper  
 Isn't gonna solve it all  
 But it's a damn good place to start

No law's gonna change us  
 We have to change us  
 Whatever god you believe in  
 We come from the same one  
 Strip away the fear  
 Underneath it's all the same love  
 About time that we raised up

And I can't change  
 Even if I tried  
 Even if I wanted to  
 And I can't change  
 Even if I tried  
 Even if I wanted to  
 My love, my love, my love  
 She keeps me warm

Love is patient, love is kind  
 Love is patient (not cryin' on Sundays)  
 Love is kind (not crying on Sundays)<sup>22</sup>

I don't call this antinomianism. This is clear law preaching. The law condemns you who call yourselves Christians and oppose what your religion teaches you. Your religion teaches you love but you hate. It teaches you that God made all of us and loves all of us. But you insist that those of us that he made to be gay must be rewired. You say we must change. But we can't change. God loves us as we are. If you say we must change you hate us. God teaches you to love us, to be patient, to be kind. You say it's a decision. You say I can be cured by religion. But I say that I can't change. This is who I am, what I am, and God loves me just the way I am.

Can they change? They can't change themselves. But they can be changed. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, St. Paul lists homosexuals among the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Then in verse eleven he says, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." The inspired Scriptures clearly teach that a homosexual can change and no longer be a homosexual. That's the plain sense of Paul's words, and the plain meaning of the text is the divine teaching.

This is vital for us to affirm, for we are being pressured constantly to regard homosexuality, or "being gay," as a condition comparable to one's race. It is determined, set, and unchangeable. Says who? Says the established elite within the social sciences. Take that! Now back off! Stay in your theological ghetto and don't transgress to where you don't belong.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.metrolyrics.com/same-love-lyrics-macklemore.html>

To complicate matters, many who speak for the Christian Church combine truth with error by affirming the truth that a homosexual can be changed while injecting this with the errors of synergism and perfectionism. If he sincerely yields himself to the influence of the Holy Spirit he will be delivered from his homosexual desires.

But it doesn't work that way. We know from God's word and we know from experience that the sin that is forgiven is not immediately purged from our desires. In fact, the desires may well persist until the day we die. We need to be clear on this. The change that God works in a homosexual is already and not yet. He is already a saint through faith in Christ who alone is his righteousness. He is not yet confirmed in that holiness that will be revealed within him perfectly only in the resurrection. So the Christian who has been delivered from homosexuality has not yet completely triumphed over it. Homosexual desires may well hound him all his life. To those desires he says:

Sins, disturb my soul no longer;  
I am baptized into Christ.  
I have comfort even stronger:  
Jesus' cleansing sacrifice.  
Should a guilty conscience seize me  
Since my Baptism did release me  
In a dear forgiving flood,  
Sprinkling me with Jesus' blood?<sup>23</sup>

Above all, the Christian who has felt and still feels homosexual desires should no more define himself, identify himself, as a homosexual than the Christian who lusts after a woman to whom he is not married should identify himself as an adulterer or a Christian who hates his brother should identify himself as a murderer. Such self-identifications are beneficial only within the context of confession and absolution. We daily die and rise again. But we do not identify ourselves with the sins that God washes away in Holy Baptism. We do not identify ourselves with those sins for which we have been absolved. Jesus identifies himself with those sins when he bears them on the cross, and we leave them there where they belong and claim the name Christian.

The so called "gay rights" movement lies. It lies about God. God is not responsible for homosexuality. To say that God makes a person a homosexual is to accuse God of acting against his very nature. When God made us in his own image he made us male and female and he made the man and the woman so that they could and would become one flesh and from that union God would bless them with children. Homosexual sex is, by its very nature, an assault on God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

The so called "gay rights" movement lies about man. Telling a homosexual that he was a homosexual, he is a homosexual, and he will always be a homosexual is a lie. It is to rob the homosexual of a future that God provides in Christ, a

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<sup>23</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, Prepared by the Worship Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1996. Hymn #246, verse 2.

future under God's grace, a future in which God forgives him of all his sins, including homosexuality, and the Holy Spirit works in him to renew his heart and mind to be conformed to the image in which God made us in the beginning.

The so called "gay rights" movement lies about the Church. It accuses the Church of hating homosexuals. If there is any truth to the Freudian notion that homosexuals have fixated in a stage of sexual development, here would be some evidence for it. For it is a childish argument to say that one who opposes my will and says no to what I want hates me. We say no to those we love when we know that if they follow their own desires they will end up miserable. We hate homosexuality because we love those entrapped in it. A father who does what it takes to get his son off of drugs, his daughter out of prostitution, his wife off of alcohol addition, is engaged in a battle and it is always a battle of love. This is what we must communicate to homosexuals and those who affirm them in their sin. You call us haters. We will love you in spite of it. We know the love of God in Christ and that is the only thing in the world that can deliver you from your sin.

This love is not sentimental indulgence. It is clear, purposeful, and powerful. Above all, it is truth itself. We mustn't be sidetracked by lies and we mustn't permit ourselves to be bullied by politically calculated charges of bullying. It is not necessary for us to bow down before the altar of political correctness, conceding that there is an epidemic of bullying against homosexuals, in an attempt to be granted credentials of decency from those who attack our God and his revealed truth. True love does not permit the enemies of God's truth to set the ground rules. And here are their rules: If you condemn homosexuality as sin against God and if you tell the homosexual that homosexuals do not inherit the kingdom of God you are a bully. So get used to it. If they are going to condemn you, let them condemn you. You know what love does and you know what hatred does. You are a Christian, taught by God. You don't need to suffer instruction on what love requires and what hatred does from the enemies of God's word. But you do need to speak the truth to them and to do it in love.

### **Part V: Husbands, Fathers, Wives, and Mothers**

Submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh

and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:21-33)

About twenty years ago I was visiting a parishioner in the hospital on a Sunday afternoon. It happened to be Mother’s Day and we were talking about mothers and motherhood. He told me, “The greatest gift any father can give to his children is to love their mother.” I had never heard it said that way before. But it sums up nicely the relationship between the estate of marriage and the estate of the family. God established marriage when he took out Adam’s rib and made a woman from it and brought her to Adam. God established the family when he made man in his image both male and female and blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply. Both marriage and the family are divine institutions. Both are grounded in God’s work of creation. Both are blessed by God’s word. Both exist here in this world until the end of time. Both are defended in the Decalogue. Marriage is defended in the Sixth Commandment that forbids adultery. The family is defended in the Fourth Commandment that requires us to honor our father and our mother. That these two commandments support one another is as obvious as the fact that wives become mothers and husbands become fathers.

I imagine that if I were to stand up here talking to you about my personal relationship with my wife, you would consider this an abuse of my invitation. It might be even more annoying than if I were to brag about my children or my grandchildren. After all, you have your own wives and you have your own children. You certainly don’t need to hear me talk about mine. But if I were a woman, and if you were women, you would expect me to talk about my husband and my children because that’s what women do. Men are not women.

For the first sixteen years of my ministry, until he died eighteen years ago, my father would often call me on the phone and we would talk. We’d talk for maybe forty five minutes. After I would hang up, my wife would ask me how Mom was doing. I’d give her a blank look. I didn’t know. We didn’t talk about Mom. We talked theology.

Dort would get a kick out of that. It’s one of those man/woman distinctions of which we are aware but that we don’t entirely understand. It’s not that men are more cerebral and women more emotional, for women can use their brains as well as men can and men have feelings too. Perhaps it’s that men think more in ideas and women think more in personal relationships. We could talk all day about the differences between a man and a woman and conclude that it’s just what God said in Genesis chapter 2. “I will make him an help meet for him.” The woman is comparable to the man. She is suitable for him. She is the same as he, but she is not the same. She is different but she is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. A man and a woman go together, fit together, and by God’s institution – that is, by his work and his word – are joined together, and yet neither is ever interchangeable with the other.

The Church as the bride of Christ is not the only metaphor the Scriptures use to describe the Holy Christian Church. The church is the temple, a nation, a people, a flock of sheep, a treasure in the field, and so on. But when God compares the church to a building he is not giving us a lesson on architecture. When he compares the church to a nation he is not teaching us political doctrine. When he compares the church to a flock of sheep he is not giving us instruction in the care of animals. But when he calls Christ the heavenly bridegroom and the church his holy bride he most certainly is teaching us about husbands and wives.

This beautiful metaphor where the husband is Christ and the wife is Christ's bride is particularly apt in illustrating for us the relationship between the central article of our faith and the first and foundational institution God established in this world, the institution of matrimony, which serves as the foundation for the domestic estate. Marriage and the family are joined together by God. All civil authority traces back to the authority that God has put in the home. But a Christian family has more than civil authority. It has Christian authority. It is this authority I would like to ask you to consider with me as we discuss the relationship between the husband and wife in light of the relationship between Christ and his church.

St. Paul tells us that the wife should submit to her husband as to the Lord and that the husband should love his wife as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her. The giving of himself includes his vicarious satisfaction, both his active and passive obedience. Clearly, the focus is on the cross. That is where he gave his life into death. He had the authority to give it and to take it up again. The authority of Christ is the authority of his vicarious obedience, suffering, and death. This is the authority the Son of exercises on earth. It is the authority to forgive sins. This is how baptism becomes the washing that cleanses Christ's church and makes her holy and sets her before her Lord Jesus as a glorious church without spot or wrinkle – blameless in his sight. It is the forgiveness of sins. It is justification by God's grace alone. You cannot understand what the church is if you do not understand the justification of the sinner by grace alone, through faith alone, for the sake of the redemption that Christ achieved for us when he gave his life for us.

That Christ has the authority of God's law is a given. It was the pre-incarnate Christ who appeared to Moses at the burning bush. The call of Moses sent Israel out of Egypt into the Sinai desert to receive from God the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai. Jesus, whose proper office is evangelical, is the clearest and strictest law preacher of them all, interpreting the Ten Commandments according to their true spirit. But in speaking to his disciples and through them to the whole church and especially to his ministers as he claimed all authority in heaven and on earth he specifically gave his church the authority of the forgiveness of sins. When you think of Jesus, authority, and the Holy Christian Church, you think of the authority to forgive his people all their sins.

Who else has this authority? Only Christ has it. Only Christ and those to whom he gives it. Indeed, this is how he governs his church. This is how he wins her heart. This is how the head of the church leads his bride through the dangers and troubles of this life and this world into the glories of heaven. He rules over her with his blood-bought evangelical authority, the authority to forgive sinners their sins freely by his grace.

This is the most wonderful relationship in all of creation, for it restores the original creation. The lost image is regained. Everything that belongs to Christ belongs to his church. She knows it and counts on it. Her submission to her Lord is the submission of faith. The obedience of faith is not a meritorious faith, for true faith cannot be meritorious. It is rather the faith that forms the life of the faithful. It is from submitting to having her burden of sin borne away; of having her dirty feet washed; of being served by the Suffering Servant, the minister who gives his life a ransom for many that she is set free. In her freedom she honors him who bestowed it. She lays claim to his name. His identity is her identity.

I am talking about Christ and his church. But is this not also the description of the Christian husband and wife? It is grounded in the doctrine of the atonement and justification. It establishes that personal relationship that defines the good and noble life in this world.

The submission of the wife to her husband is unique. There is no other relationship quite like it. Theology by word study has its limitations. How the word *hypotassoo* is used elsewhere in the New Testament is not going to tell us what it means for a wife to submit to her husband. Yes, it is used to talk about the submission or obedience that children owe their parents and that slaves owe their masters. But, if I may put in a word for what is condescendingly called dogmatic exegesis, when the Scriptures set forth a paradigm it's not a bad idea to adopt it and to interpret the text in light of it. The paradigm or pattern is Christ's love for his bride, the Holy Christian Church, and the Church's submission to her bridegroom, Jesus Christ. This is how we are to understand the submission of the wife to her own husband.

The sacred text does not tell the husband to have his wife submit but rather tells the wife to submit herself. No man can make his wife submit. It doesn't work. If he tried to make her, it wouldn't be submission – not the submission of the church to Christ. The church's submission to Christ is essentially submission to an evangelical authority. You cannot legally impose an evangelical authority. It doesn't work. It's like coercing a gift. It is no longer a gift.

Wives that won't submit to their husbands rob their husbands of the dignity of their office and strip them of their manhood. It is cruel. It is mean. It is destructive. It causes pain. But husbands can no more require of their wives this submission than they can coerce love. Faith and love are elicited. A Christian husband must know this. You don't lecture your wife into following you and respecting you. You don't whine your way into her heart. You love her.

The only instance the Gospels record of our Lord Jesus displaying violent behavior was when he drove the money changers out of the temple. The temple is where God meets his people. So let's do a little mixing of metaphors here. Christ's body in the temple. The church is Christ's body. This means the church is the temple. Those money changers were dissing his bride and Jesus was not going to tolerate it. It is unthinkable that the Lord Jesus would be violent against his church. He will direct his anger against those who would disgrace her, or shame her, or exploit her. He, who lays down his life for his bride, will never raise a hand to strike her. He will not insult her. He will bear with her, and cover her faults.

This is how husbands teach their wives to submit to them as to the Lord Jesus. They give themselves in service to their wives. They humble themselves before them as Christ displayed himself as Lord while washing his disciples' feet.

This humility is authoritative. This is what the world cannot understand. Only a Christian understands this. It is precisely in humble service to his wife that the husband exercises his God-given headship. He is her head. He may not forget it. He does not take orders from his wife. He does not submit to his wife. He doesn't follow his wife around like a puppy looking for approval.

A Christian woman who shows respect to her husband shows respect to Jesus Christ himself. If he does not measure up, Jesus does. If he fails to love, Jesus succeeds. Wherever the husband lacks the wisdom, the good sense, the strength, or the kindness she needs to rely upon, she respects him in spite of his lack and thus honors her Lord Jesus who lacks nothing.

A woman who submits to her husband submits to her own husband. She does not submit to men in general. She doesn't submit to another man. She certainly doesn't submit to another woman. And by no means does she let another woman exercise authority over her man. If she's not going to govern him, though she may be sorely tempted because she may think he needs her to do it now and then, nobody else is going to do it either.

This is what is most offensive to womanhood about women preachers. It is possible that a woman who preaches does not intend to speak with authority. Perhaps she feels she is there only to share her personal and non-authoritative feelings. But inasmuch as evangelical Christian preaching is by its nature authoritative, preaching without authority demeans the preaching office. Don't preach unless you are speaking God's word with authority. But a woman who presumes to stand up before the men of the congregation and speak authoritatively as from God by that act demeans womanhood. Every Christian wife should be scandalized to have their husband sitting next to her submitting to the authoritative preaching of a woman.

Men may not abdicate their spiritual authority without ruining their own families. No, a man cannot make his wife submit. But he can lead the prayers at the dinner table. He can assume the spiritual leadership of the home. Listen to the familiar words from Deuteronomy chapter six:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The words of the *shema* are located. They aren't floating around in space. They are placed in certain places. First, they are in your heart. Second, they are in your diligent teaching of them to your children. The words are all over your body and on your house. The words God speaks are joined to you and your home. What God joins together, let not man put asunder.

This is why the caption at the top of each of the six chief parts of the Catechism reads: "As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household." The teaching of God's word to God's children is primarily the responsibility of their father, the husband of their mother, who is the head of his wife and the head of his own home.

Be a man! Manly men teach God's word to their children. Manly men protect their wives from foolish and harmful influences. Manly men lead their women. They don't follow them. The first sin – the original sin – was identified as a sin by God beginning with the words, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife." Don't misunderstand. Husbands should listen to their wives and respect them and their opinions. But the husband that submits to his wife as his spiritual head has lost his credibility as a man.

The Lutheran Church in North Dakota and northern Minnesota is in bad shape. Pietism is a form of feminism, as it locates the truth in the authentic religious experience instead of in the written word of God or in the pure proclamation of that word. Women conform more naturally to pietism than do their men, and so the men are left out in the cold as far as religious exercises are concerned. The result is that the men are spiritually emasculated.

It is not possible for confessional Lutheranism to survive in a spiritually matriarchal environment. The men simply won't have it. They will appease their wives, attending church or attending church on special occasions, but they will not follow them. Patriarchy does not deny to a woman her womanly identity, especially when the fathers pattern themselves after the love of their heavenly Father whose Son sacrificed himself on the cross out of love for his bride. Matriarchy, on the other hand, is a shameful thing for a man as a man to endure. We read in Isaiah chapter three:

Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them,  
For they shall eat the fruit of their doings.  
Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him,  
For the reward of his hands shall be given him.  
As for My people, children are their oppressors,

And women rule over them.  
 O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err,  
 And destroy the way of your paths. Isaiah 3:10-12

We need to speak the truth in a world of falsehood. The truth is that men who permit themselves to be governed by women have given up their manhood. Where women rule men will leave and go somewhere else. Where women rule relationships triumph over doctrine. Pietism and liberalism drive out orthodox Lutheranism.

The path to a reinvigorated, doctrinally sound, and evangelically focused Lutheran Church in America begins in the home where men assume the duties God gave to husbands and fathers. This is not complicated. If a man does not do it a woman will. Then it becomes women's work. When religion becomes women's work it will be fashioned according to a woman's way of working. A little girl learns from her mommy how to heal bruises and mend relationships. A little boy learns from his daddy some form of combat, whether against fish and deer or against the devil, the world, and the flesh. The material bond requires the paternal defense. Doctrine is the defense. Without it, there is nothing to bind anyone to anyone but mere sentiment. A Christianity that shuns the doctrine that separates us in favor of celebrating whatever remains to unite us is a Christianity in which women have taken over from men. That the unifying feature of the church is no longer spiritual but carnal goes unnoticed at first. But sooner or later, perhaps a good while after the doctrinal substance has been extracted and the edifice is left in place without it, the whole house falls of its own weight. By then, most of the men will have been safely outdoors and probably won't even notice the crash.

More effective church politicking, a new and more perfect form of church polity, another study by a synodical commission, another Reformed revival movement adapted for Lutheran consumption – none of these things will empower Lutheran husbands and fathers to assume the responsibilities that God gave them. The truth will. The truth is that feminism is a lie. God does not give the woman the rule over her man. The husband's authority over his wife and children is meet, right, and salutary. That vicious men, unregenerate men, unspiritual men, selfish, hedonistic, violent, self-serving and self-indulgent men have laid claim to illegitimate authority to abuse their wives and children is no more an argument against the legitimate authority of the husband and the father in the home than the criminal takeover of government by the Nazis and Communists is an argument for civil anarchy. The abuse of a gift does not diminish the gift. Feminism promises women protection from their own flesh and blood. Is she not bone of his bones and flesh and his flesh? Who will protect the Christian woman from her Christian husband? The bureaucratic state will! She is ensnared by the promise, "You will rule over him." But she will never rule over him. He won't be ruled. She cannot rule him. She can only emasculate him. Both of them will suffer from the ministrations of a coercive, legalistic, dehumanizing power that knows nothing of God or God's love.

Godly men who govern their families with God's word are essential to the church's wellbeing in this world. I know we used to poke fun of that slogan,

“What would Jesus do?” with its cutesy letters, WWJD engraved on a bracelet. We rightly pointed out that the primary work of Jesus is not in providing us with an example but in providing us with salvation. Reducing Jesus to a new Moses is to dishonor him. But when it comes to Christian husbands who ask themselves how God wants them to treat their wives, there is no better answer to give them than to remind them what Jesus does for his church and to do the same for their wives. He most certainly is the pattern, the example for husbands to follow. Criticizing the wife, putting her down, making fun of her, lecturing her, putting her on trial – does Jesus do any of these things? Jesus would die before he would abuse her. And he did. Your wife is your most precious pearl. She is the treasure in the field. She is to you what the church is to Christ, and her value is the value of his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. That’s what your wife is worth to you.

Godly women who submit to their own Christian husbands as to the Lord are teaching their children more than any Sunday school, Christian day school, or schoolteacher can teach them. When the wife of the children’s father submits to their father’s fatherly authority with humility and respect – it is there that the children learn respect for God himself and to everyone in the world to whom it is due. As the Christian wife models for her children the church’s faithful submission to her Lord Jesus, the children learn that the gospel cannot be confined to any institutional ghetto, but is the defining truth of their lives. Why? Because Mom says so. And Mom does so. And Mom is always right.

My children are mostly grown and most of them are raising their own children. It’s interesting to watch them in action and to reminisce about how life used to be. When the children are little and particularly self-willed, parents naturally focus on parental authority in the legal sense of keeping them from doing this and requiring them to do that. The fathers speak of the inherent justice of spanking and oppose the arguments of bleeding hearts who think it’s a sin. The mothers talk about the nuts and bolts of what works to get the kids to do this and not do that. The rearing of children often appears to be an essentially legal enterprise, and of course it is the place where children do learn their proper relationship to all civil authority. It is especially important to emphasize this when civil institutions attempt to intrude on the authority of the home. Our children do not belong to the state. They do not belong to the public schools or to the parochial schools or to any other schools. When we ask others to teach our children we are asking them to do what God gave us to do and it remains our duty to do so even when we have delegated the responsibility to others.

But in reaffirming that the Fourth Commandment makes parental authority the foundation and source of all civil authority – that is to say, the authority of the government as outlined by St. Paul in Romans 13 is contingent upon and derivative of the authority of fathers and mothers over their children as God engraved it on the stones he gave to Moses for Israel as recorded in Exodus 20 – the chief purpose of marriage and the family is not to provide a foundation for civil authority, but to provide children with the nurture, encouragement, comfort, instruction, and guidance that his word provides for them and to provide it for them from those who love them the most.

The divine institutions of marriage and the family exist for the benefit of the divine institution of the holy Christian Church. God has joined husbands to wives and wives to husbands. He has joined marriage to children and children to marriage. He has blessed what he has established. When we preach, teach, and live in support of one divine institution we do so in support of them all. God's work and God's word make God's institution. This is no theological detail. This is the stuff of which life is made, and we pastors have the privilege to teach it from him who has come that we may have life and have it more abundantly.