

CHAPTER 11

Conclusion— Glorify God in your body

This chapter summarises the argument developed in the course of this study. We will use a series of questions and answers to take the reader step-by-step through the key points.

Question 1: What is a human being?

Human beings are creatures with rational souls and bodies. We are divided into two sexes, male and female, according to the biology of our bodies and we are designed to reproduce by means of sexual intercourse between these two sexes.

Question 2: Why do human beings exist?

Contrary to the claims of atheist writers like Bertrand Russell, Lewis Wolpert and Richard Dawkins, human beings do not exist as the accidental result of the operation of material forces which had no understanding of what they were doing.

Human beings exist because we are created and preserved in existence by the infinitely powerful, wise and good God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the creator of heaven and earth. Since humans are created by this immaterial God, we have an immaterial element to our being, namely our souls, and have an ineradicable sense that there is a difference between good and evil and that good is better than evil.

Question 3: What is the purpose of human existence?

Human beings exist to know, love, and serve God both in this world and the world to come and, as those made in God's image and likeness, to love and care for the people and the world that he has made.

Question 4: How do we live rightly before God?

We live rightly before God when we fulfil the purpose for which we were made.

The grace of God means that we have the freedom to do this because we have been liberated from the power of sin, death, and the devil by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and because the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts to make us holy people who live according to God's will.

Because of the continuing activity of the Devil and the continuing influence of our old natures, we shall not in this life ever live perfectly rightly before God. However, when we do fail God offers us forgiveness and a new start.

Question 5: What does it mean to love?

To love someone or something is to discern its nature, delight in its existence, and act towards it in accordance with its existence.

To love God is therefore to discern who God is, to delight in who he is, and to respond to him in ways that accord with who he is. Because we discern that God is our all-wise and all-loving king, we love him by submitting to his authority, accepting his love, and allowing ourselves to be guided by his instruction.

To love other human beings is likewise to discern who they are, delight in who they are, and respond to them accordingly. Because all human beings are made by God to know, love, and serve him, we show love to them when we behave towards them in ways that help them to achieve this purpose.

Question 6: How do we receive God's instruction about how to live?

Although God can instruct us through visions and prophecies, we normally receive God's instruction in two ways:

1. Through the way that he has made us and the world as a whole (so called 'natural revelation').
2. Through the Bible, which supplements natural revelation by telling us about how God has created us, how he has acted in the history of Israel and through Jesus Christ to rescue us and all creation from sin and death, and how he will act in future so that we can share life with him forever in a new heaven and a new earth.

Through these two sources we learn who God is, who we are, and how we should behave in consequence.

The teaching of the Early Fathers and the Church of England's historic formularies help us to understand the teaching given to us in the Bible and how it applies to our lives.

Question 7: What is sex?

Sex means two things. First, it means the biological distinction between male and female human beings. Secondly, it is short hand for sexual activity, which is the penetration of the female vagina by the male penis and other forms of bodily activity that are intended to accompany or lead to such penetration, or to simulate the physical pleasure produced by it.

Question 8: Is it possible to live outside the 'gender binary?'

The 'gender binary' is the term that is used nowadays to refer to the belief that human beings are either male or female and should relate to each other as such. Some people are now seeking to live outside the gender binary by claiming to be neither male nor female, or by seeking to live as women though they are biologically male, or as men though they are biologically female.

From a Christian perspective it is impossible really to live outside the gender binary for two reasons. First, natural revelation teaches us that almost all human beings are clearly either male or female, even when psychologically they find this something that is hard to accept. Secondly, even the tiny minority of people who are genuinely intersex do not have bodies that are neither male nor female, but rather bodies that contain elements of both. This means that in spite of the disorder in their sexual development they too bear witness to God's creation of humanity as a sexually dimorphic species.

In addition, the Bible teaches us that to reject our sex is to be disobedient to God by choosing not to live as the person he has created us to be.

Question 9: What is the God given context for sexual activity?

The Bible teaches that the God-given context for sexual activity is marriage, which is an exclusive, lifelong, relationship between one man and one woman. Within marriage sexual activity has two purposes: to express and deepen the loving union between husband and wife and to be the means through which children are conceived.

Question 10: What are the goods of marriage?

There are three goods of marriage:

1. It is a relationship of friendship in which a man and a woman are able to provide each other with 'mutual society, help and comfort' as they journey together towards God's eternal kingdom.
2. It is a relationship that bears witness to God's faithful love for his people and

its future consummation in the communion between God and his people in the coming kingdom.

3. It is a relationship that provides the best context for the conception of children and their nurture as people who will love and serve God in their turn.

God calls men and women to live together in marriage in an ordered form of mutual submission. The husband submits his own desires to the well-being of his wife and family by providing them with servant leadership modelled on Christ's care for his people. The wife supports him in this role and is willing to obey him when he exercises it, not because he is better or smarter than she is, but out of reverence for Christ and as a witness to the Church's need to submit to him.

Question 11: Is it right for married couples to use birth control and infertility treatment?

It is legitimate for married couples to seek to plan the number and spacing of their children and to use methods of birth control for this purpose. However, birth control methods that result in the destruction of embryos are morally problematic since embryos are people.

It is likewise legitimate for married couples to use medical technology to assist conception where this is proving difficult. However forms of infertility treatment that involve the use of third party (as in egg or sperm donation or surrogacy) are morally problematic, as are those that result in the destruction or freezing of embryos.

Question 12: Is it ever right for those who are married to divorce and re-marry?

God's intention is that marriage should be for life, so divorce is always contrary to God's perfect will. However, the New Testament permits divorce where the marriage bond has been broken through adultery and where a non-Christian spouse seeks to end the marriage. In these instances divorce is permitted (although not mandatory) and re-marriage may then follow because the first marriage has ended.

Question 13: Is everyone called to be married?

No, God does not call everyone be married. Many people are called to be single either at particular points in their lives, or for the whole of their lives.

Like marriage, singleness has its own goods. Single people are able to offer God wholehearted dedication to his service without the need to care for a family

as well (as in the case of Jesus and St Paul). Single people also point to the truth that marriage is not the final form of human existence, but that in the world to come marriage as we know it will not exist, but will be transcended in a life of perfect communion with God and with all of God's people.

Like married people, those who are called to a life of singleness need the opportunity to experience deep relationships of friendship with people of both sexes. Churches need to take responsibility for enabling this to happen.

Question 14: What is chastity?

Chastity is living in obedience to God by being sexually abstinent outside marriage and sexually faithful within it. Chastity is not only a matter of refraining from sexual activity outside marriage, but seeking to control the existence of sexually immoral thoughts by avoiding situations and activities that will lead to them.

Question 15: What is *porneia* and why should it be avoided?

Porneia is the catch-all term used in the New Testament for all forms of sexual activity outside marriage. Among other things, the first Christians were distinctive because they regarded all forms of *porneia* as off-limits for both men and women because of the command that Christians should 'glorify God in your body' by living lives of chastity. Christians today have to regard *porneia* as off-limits for the same reason, as well as because of the physical, emotional and psychological damage that extra-marital sexual activity brings in its wake.

According to the Bible, a relationship between two people of the same sex can never be marriage (even if the law describes it as such) because God created marriage as a relationship between two people of the opposite sex. In consequence, all same-sex sexual relationships are *porneia* in that they are a form of extra-marital sexual activity.

Question 16: How should Christians (including those who are same-sex attracted themselves) respond to others who are sexually attracted to those of the same sex? How should Christians (including those who suffer from gender dysphoria) respond to others who find it difficult to accept the sex into which they were born?

- a. Christians are called to treat all people with value and dignity, including everyone with same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria, as those created in God's image and likeness and for whom Christ died. Christians should also understand that this is not a matter of 'them' and 'us.' There

are Christians who experience same-sex attraction and Christians who find it difficult to accept the sex into which they were born.

- b. Christians should offer unconditional friendship and seek to understand the particular challenges faced in living in obedience to God in these areas. It is wrong to think that anyone is intrinsically less godly because of the desires they experience or the struggles they have about their sexual identity.
- c. If anyone is not already living in accordance with God's will, Christians should be willing, when the time is right, to explain to them why they believe it is not right to have sex with people of the same sex, or to reject the sex into which you were born.
- d. Christians should be willing to stand by those who are struggling and offer prayer, encouragement, and emotional, psychological and practical support to help believers to live in obedience to God.
- e. Christians should also challenge (and when necessary discipline) those who are Christians but who claim that they do not need to live in accordance with God's will in these areas, and nobody should be ordained who is not living in ways that offer a 'wholesome pattern and example' to the Church and to the wider world.

Question 17: What is the Church called to do in the present situation?

The teaching about marriage and sexuality that has been outlined in this study and summarised above involves a call to an ascetic lifestyle, as Christopher Roberts suggests in his book *Creation and Covenant*. That is to say, it involves a call to renounce things that we desire to do for the sake of God and his kingdom. Furthermore, as Roberts goes on to say,

If the church wants to commend such asceticism as regards sex, it will be credible if the church is a community wherein a life of celibacy and singleness is plausible and attractive. If sexual difference is to be an occasion of freedom, an arena in which men and women seek together a social ecology to mock and rival the ways of concupiscence, then very few aspects of contemporary church life will remain unscathed. The early patristic confidence that ecclesial social life should be visibly different from pagan life, in particular at the sexual level, would need to be reclaimed. How would the church respond to youth culture if it genuinely believed that the dynamic of the sexes is grounded in the imago

Dei and not in romance? How might courtship habits and living arrangements need to be reconfigured if lay celibacy were a bona fide response to sexuality? What new tone of voice would need to be adopted of Christians who realized that everyone who has ever lusted selfishly is judged by the tradition's teleology for sexual difference and not just the homosexually inclined? Reclaiming the theological tradition about sexual difference would entail not only a chastening word to the revisionist theologians but also a thoroughgoing revolution for almost all Christians.³⁷³

It follows that the challenge facing anyone in the Church of England who wishes to remain faithful to God in the areas of sexuality and family life is not just to stop the Church of England changing its teaching and practice—important though that is—and not just to persuade politicians to allow a space for traditional Christian teaching and practice in the public square. First and foremost it is a challenge to allow God to enable us to live lives that are distinctive and attractive, and show why living in God's way is a good idea. We need to allow God to make us people who live in such a way that those watching us stop and say 'I want some of that.'

Of course, we need to be realistic about the fact that, even if we live in this way, we may not achieve immediate and obvious success. The Church remained a tiny and despised minority in the Roman Empire for many centuries. During the Nazi rise to power in both the German state and church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminded his listeners in a sermon on Matthew 16:13-18 that Christians must accept that it is Christ's prerogative to build his Church as and when he wills, and our lesser job is to remain faithful and to bear witness to him, confident that he knows what he is doing:

It is a great comfort which Christ gives to his church: you confess, preach, bear witness to me, and I alone will build where it pleases me. Do not meddle in what is my province. Church, do what is given to you to do well and you have done enough. But do it well. Pay no heed to views and opinions, don't ask for judgements, don't always be calculating what will happen, don't always be on the look-out for another refuge! Church, stay a church! But Church confess, confess, confess! Christ alone is your Lord, from his grace alone can you live as you are. Christ builds.

And the gates of hell shall not prevail against thee. Death, the greatest inheritance of everything that has existence, here meets its end. Close by the prec-

373 Christopher Roberts, *Creation and Covenant*, London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007, p.p.245-246.

ipice of the valley of death the church is founded, the church which makes confession of Christ its life. The church possesses eternal life just where death seeks to take hold of her; and he seeks to take hold of her because she has possession of eternal life. The Confessing Church is the eternal church because Christ protects her. Her eternity is not visible in this world. She remains despite the attack of this world. The waves pass right over her and sometimes she seems to be completely covered and lost. But the victory is hers, because Christ her Lord is by her side and he has overcome the world of death. Do not ask to see the victory; believe in the victory and it is yours.³⁷⁴

374 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, London: Fontana, 1970, pp.212-213.