

Marriage & Family

I have a sentence from Augustine from *The City of God*, and I think as we approach the section on authority structures, he has the right perspective on this. Augustine said, “In the family of the just who live by faith and are as yet pilgrims journeying on to the celestial city, even those who rule, serve those they seem to command for they rule not from a love of power but from a sense of the duty they owe to others; not because they are proud of authority but because they love mercy.” Servant leadership has become something of a cliché in the last decade, but it actually goes back to Augustine. That is a rather remarkable perspective. It clearly represents the New Testament perspective on authority structures, and it is very helpful. “They rule not from a love of power but from a sense of the duty they owe to others; not because they are proud of authority, but because they love mercy.” Let us pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank You for the institutions that You have ordained for human flourishing: for the family, for the civil government, for the Church. We recognize that You have placed some in authority over others for our own good. We pray that we may respond biblically to these principles and that as we ourselves are in positions of authority that we may serve those to whom You commit to our care. Be with us in this class, especially we pray, as we think through the area of marriage and the family. We ask that You will be our guide. May Your Spirit teach us and lead us on level ground. We ask for Jesus' sake, amen.

Before we get into the topic of marriage and the family, let me say just a word on Christian social ethics. The Bible is concerned not just with the personal virtues of the individual—that is, of course, a key to many things—or the interpersonal relations of loving our neighbor, but the Bible is also concerned with the social structures of human beings living in community. God has made us to be community people, and so He has ordained three primary institutions for our life in this world, institutions in which—if we attend to the way God has set them up—we flourish. This is an exposition of the fifth commandment in the Christian tradition since the Middle Ages, and it works well. “Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long on the land that the Lord your God gives you.” We have seen (I think rightly) that the principle of that commandment is the rightful exercise of authority in divinely ordained social structures. It is the rightful exercise of authority. It is ordained by God. The office to which one is called is to be exercised rightfully, and it calls for the appropriate response of respect. Preeminently, honor your father and your mother.

The three institutions that God has ordained as structures for human flourishing are the family, the state, and the church. We will deal with the first of those two in this course. There is a whole other course on ecclesiology where we expand that particular structure of the church. So we are concerned about family and church in this class, and it involves our theory of social transformation. We live in a fallen world, but there is redemptive healing (substantial healing) in every area of life. My threefold approach to social transformation is that it always has these three components: personal renewal, ecclesial practice, and structural reform. You cannot have a good society without good persons, and so the Gospel comes first with its regenerating and renewing power in the individual. We may never minimize the importance of personal renewal in terms of social transformation. But it is more than that.

The second component is ecclesial practice. The people of God as a community are called to demonstrate, as Francis Schaeffer called it, a pilot plant—what true community living should look like. So, this is in our own practice in the body of Christ, those who have been personally renewed by God's grace and are being renewed. I do not think this is strictly for regeneration, but it also includes progressive sanctification. Progressive sanctification occurs in the body of Christ, so ecclesial practice is

an important component of social transformation. But there is finally an interest in structural reform. Institutions become deformed by sin. Christians have a calling or an obligation, as we are salt and light in the society in which we live, to move toward structural reform in a way that is persuasive. We are not to impose our views on others but to persuade others of the legitimacy, the need, the value, and the duty of structural reform according to the will of God. So, in the two areas that we are dealing with in terms of family and state, I am concerned that we not only have personal renewal in our own lives and demonstrate in our ecclesial practice what community living is, but also that there is a legitimate area where we must be concerned about the structural reform given the opportunities that we have under our form of government. I will elaborate on that when we come to the political area. Any viable approach to social transformation needs all three of these components. Typically they are pulled apart and one will emphasize regeneration and another will emphasize the church as a parabolic community. The other will lay all its emphasis on society. Actually, you need all three. There is no reason why these are to be pulled apart as distinct approaches to social transformation. Looking at it holistically, all three are part of that.

We have a very great concern that we understand the structure of marriage and the family as God has ordained it. Marriage and the family is a creation ordinance. It is not just for the people of God. It comes to its full power among God's people, but it is also a social institution in the world. And we have a very great concern to see that it conforms to the will of God as revealed both in nature and in Scripture.

We will begin by looking at the structure of the family. To understand according to Scripture what the family is as a normative institution ordained by God, the basic social norm for the family is the creation ordinance stated in Genesis 2:24: "For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and the two will become one flesh." I think that the first part of that verse (the leaving) points us to a structure that is established as a social unit that supercedes the existing parental structure. These verses in Genesis are very compact. They state, in terms of principle, a fundamental theological thought, and this particular verse is far-reaching in its implication for our doctrine of marriage and the family. The fact that the emphasis falls on the man leaving his father and mother indicates that there is a new social unit being formed. Of course, the woman also leaves, but it is important in terms of the way the authority structure works that we recognize that an independent social unit is being established in marriage. Marriage, quite apart from children, establishes a new social unit. It is the social unit in which God desires children to be brought forth and nurtured in the faith (for those who are believers). But it is an ordinance that God has established that appears very early in Scripture—right at the beginning—and is assumed throughout as a normative structure. The marriage-based, two-parent family begins at least with two parents from whom children are brought into the world. A parent may die but the family continues. Divorce further complicates this, but the family continues. The basic idea of family as a marriage-based social unit is established in this creation ordinance. There is the idea that it has been entered into in a socially sanctioned way with the assumption that it is going to be permanent. It is a sexually exclusive permanent unit. The first aspect of the structure of the family established in the creation ordinance is assumed all through the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not take time to defend the idea of marriage as a heterosexual union or family as the biological or legally adopted children that follow in that union. It is simply the assumption everywhere to honor your father and your mother. You see that in the list of duties in Deuteronomy, in the Proverbs, and in Jesus' example. Not only is it in the Bible as a creation ordinance and assumed everywhere in the Bible as the normative structure for the family, but it also has been historically recognized globally.

In 1950 a Yale anthropologist named George Peter Murdock did a cross-cultural study of 250 societies. He found in all of them the nuclear family unit (husband, wife, and children) as the distinct social entity serving typical function, even in cultures where there was polygamy. I think he may have coined the

term “nuclear.” The idea is that this family relationship may exist in more extended relationships. Nevertheless, this cross-cultural study, the most thorough that has ever been done, found the nuclear family in all those societies. And, at about that same time, you have in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognition that the family is the primary social unit. So, it is not just biblical recognition that you have. It has been by family, meaning the marriage-based family was universal up until about 1970 where this has been challenged in Western cultures.

I want to read a statement from 1965. It says, “The family is the cornerstone of our society more than any other force that shapes the attitudes, the hopes, the ambitions, and the values of the child. When the family collapses, it is the children that are usually damaged. When it happens on a massive scale, the community itself is crippled.” Who is that? Is that James Dobson? I gave it away by saying 1965, but that was Linden Johnson. That is his Howard University speech written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. It was common understanding of what is meant by the family, which is the marriage-based family intended as a permanent social institution. However, what was commonplace in 1965, by 1980 had become cantankerous. It is conventional in 1965 that you can talk about the family and everybody knows what you are talking about. But by the time Carter wanted to have his White House conference on the family, people began to protest that there is not one norm for the family. So he had to call it “The White House Conference on Families.” The word “families” was in the plural because empirically there are all sorts of different relations now in which children may or may not be raised that need to be taken into account. So we move from a normative definition of the family to a redefinition of the family in order to fit changing social practice.

One definition is “child rearers and children in a permanent residence.” The sexual relationship and the marital relationship in the definition of families are beside the point. Basically the family is child rearers and children in a permanent residence. Well, that radically changes the idea of the family. I think that people have somewhat backed off of that now, and so there is much more of a tendency to speak of the family as the normative social unit. But that literature is still around, and it still has its effects in working its way out in undermining what we understand by the traditional family. Traditional family is not something that was in the 1950s in terms of the particular cultural forms it developed in, nor was it only in the Victorian Age. The traditional family is the marriage-based, two-parent family. That is the way traditional families should be understood. Within that structure, there are many ways in which it may be worked out in terms of what a family looks like and the functions that it fulfills. But the basic idea of the family, what I call “the conjugal family,” that has not caught on is that it is marriage-based. I got that from Alan Keyes. He is very strong on the point that the historic black commitment to the marriage-based family is something he wants to recapture. I think “marriage-based” and “two-parent family” are good terms. We recognize that sometimes a parent dies, leaving one single parent involved. But what this family structure opposes is the idea of intentionally bringing children into the world outside of that committed relationship that is intended to be permanent between a man and a woman.

This leads me into my second point, which is to look at the marriage covenant. This is in Genesis 2:24. This is the cleaving aspect.

Cleaving has the dual sense of affection and loyalty. It is affectionate loyalty, and it is elsewhere expressed in the Old Testament as the marriage covenant, especially in Malachi. The book of Malachi is a protest against divorce, of breaking faith because though she is your partner and the wife of your marriage covenant, the real horror in divorce is the infidelity to the marriage covenant (the cleaving aspect of Genesis 2:24). In this covenant, a man and a woman pledge themselves unreservedly to be companions and partners in a common life and conjugal love. Jesus says that the two are no longer two, but they are now one flesh, joined together by God in this marriage covenant.

I traced the form in English of the marriage service back to the 14th Century. I think it can be traced back farther, but it goes back at least to the 14th Century. That is the age of Chaucer. It is divided into the espousals and the nuptials. We still have that. We say, for example, in the marriage service, "Will you have this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife and will you cleave only to her as long as you both shall live in the marriage according to God's Word?" It says, "as long as you both shall live." That is a remnant of the betrothal ceremony that originally was separated from the nuptial. Then it goes on, "I take you to be my lawfully wedded wife to have and to hold in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, as long as we both shall live." That really captures the biblical idea of covenant. When I did the research on that I found that the seminary I was with at the time had Anglican material. It had a big book with all these services and so I rushed down there to get this out and got over to the marriage service, but it was all in Latin. That was not going to be very helpful to me, so I was thumbing through it, trying to find the vows. All of a sudden, there they were in Middle English, the same as we have today except for one or two changes in spelling. Why is that?

The service is always in Latin, but when it comes to what people really need to know about what they are doing in making their covenant, it is in the vernacular. It is in English so everybody understands what is going on when it comes to the making of the marriage covenant. It is different from a contract. It is a whole person-to-person commitment. There were contracts in the ancient Near East. We have a record of one that comes from about 440 BC, the contract of Mibtahiah's third marriage. Mibtahiah was a Jewish woman who married into the Egyptians. Her third marriage is to a man named Ashor and he says, "She is my wife and I am her husband from this day forever." Then it goes on to say, "Should Mibtahiah tomorrow or another day stand up in a congregation and say, 'I divorce my husband Ashor,' well the price of the divorce shall be upon her head. And should Ashor tomorrow or another day stand up in a congregation and say, 'I divorce my wife Mibtahiah, he shall forfeit her bride price and all that she has brought in with her she shall take out, shred and thread on one day at one stroke and she will go wither she will without suit or process.'" It is an early prenuptial agreement. It is supposing the very real liability this is that the highest third marriage is not going to be permanent and so the rich take care of the economic arrangements in such cases. So prenuptial agreements are not new, but they are foreign to the Bible. They are foreign to the idea of personal commitment that you have in the biblical idea of covenant.

I think we need to explore the question of when a couple is married. When you look at the biblical material on marriage, you will observe that there is, first, the personal commitment (which technically is the betrothal, a covenant to unite as man and wife), which is socially recognized. Everyone knew who was betrothed to another person. It was a public event, but it was the personal commitment to be united as husband and wife. It is typically followed by a public celebration or the wedding feast. In the Gospels, the word "wedding" refers to the feast six times and one time to marriage. It is the way the covenant is and the way marriage comes about in the Bible. It involves the twofold aspect of a personal commitment and public celebration, or at the very least public declaration. If we want to define marriage in modern terms, the key is that there is both a personal commitment to the ordinance God has instituted (a sexually exclusive lifelong union) but it also involves a public declaration of that intent. So, I would define a marriage as publicly declared consent to live together as man and wife. Or, to put it in the form of a sentence, publicly declared consent to live together as man and wife or as husband and wife constitutes a marriage and legitimized sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse does not establish the marriage. It follows the commitment in the public declaration of commitment in the normative way. Sometimes sexual intercourse comes before the personal commitment, but it ought not to. Sexual intercourse without the commitment is not a marriage. There is some confusion about that because sexual intercourse is never casual in the Scriptures. It is always, in some way, uniting. That is why Paul says, "Do you not know that you are one body with the prostitute?" It does not say "one flesh"—that

would be saying too much. You are one body with the prostitute and that ought not to be, because you are not married to the prostitute. That is not the relationship that is established by sexual intercourse. Marriage is established by public declaration of personal commitment to marriage as a sexually exclusive permanent union.

What do we say to a couple who has had premarital sexual intercourse? Well, they are not married, and it may not be wise for them to become married. People have fallen into sin of various sorts, and that needs to be evaluated, especially where couples have been cohabiting. There are two forms of cohabitation. Some couples make the personal commitment but do not go through the ceremony. They are committed to marriage as an ordinance of God. That is a permanent lifelong union. There is no way third parties can recognize that unless they declare their intent.

In America it used to be that after a certain amount of time, if a couple stayed together long enough and put themselves forth as husband and wife, or if they had on their mailbox “Mr. and Mrs. Jones” rather than “Mr. Jones and Ms. Smith,” consent could be conferred. That is common-law marriage. Those laws are being questioned, and some states are taking them off the books. You will counsel couples who are cohabiting and have made a personal commitment to the essence of marriage, but there is no way we can recognize that without a public declaration. It does not have to be a wedding. That is a celebration. It just has to be witnessed by two so we know where couples stand and how to treat them in terms of the church and in terms of society. It is very important when it comes to children that that authority structure is established so we know who is responsible for these children. You get the argument because of no-fault divorce, the excessive divorce rate, and the people not taking the promise to lifelong union seriously. They say that it is hypocritical. Well, somebody said hypocrisy is vice not to virtue and so it is granted that some people take those vows lightly and do not intend a lifelong union. It does not mean we can dispense with the idea of marriage as a permanent union for it to be socially recognized. I would say it is an ecclesially recognized union. We have to know on what basis a couple is living together. We should seek to bring them around to public declaration of their basis. If they have not made a public commitment, they are just living together. If one of those partners becomes a Christian, we need to tell him or her to either force the issue and become married or to break off the relationship. It is not following God’s norm. If they are both Christians, then we need to persuade them what marriage is before we take them into the church. We do not jump on them and stomp on them with both feet but find out where they are in terms of this relationship. They have various influences that may be at work. However, we must uphold the biblical norm. It is for our good that God has established marriage to be a covenant that is publicly registered and understood. So, the leaving establishes the idea of family structure. A new social unit is being formed at the time of marriage. The cleaving points to the commitment, a publicly declared commitment to a permanent, sexually exclusive union.

My third point would emphasize the vocation of marriage. We have already discussed the meaning of “one flesh.” It is there in seed form in Genesis 2:24. The marriage vocation is for the union of the couple. That is its first purpose. Companionship is the first calling of marriage. That is essentially what it is for. I derive that from the beginning of Genesis 2:18 where the Lord says, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him an *ezer* corresponding to him.” That is the Hebrew word that you may already know. In the second stanza of the hymn, “Come thou fount” it says, “Here I raise my *Eben-ezer*,” which is a stone of help. That is the same word for woman that is used in Genesis 2:18. The idea of *ezer* as you can see from that reference is that it is not an assistant, let alone a menial assistant. It is not as though God said, “It is not good for Adam to be so busy. I will give him someone to help him with the chores.” It has more the connotation of a rescuer. God came to Israel’s rescue and Eve comes to Adam’s rescue in his aloneness. All of these things are reciprocal. The leaving is also on the part of the woman. The cleaving is also on the part of the man. And the helping is also the man and the woman.

The Westminster Confession got it right when it said that marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife. That is a very important phrase. It is the mutual help of husband and wife. Genesis 2:18 has been overemphasized in the direction that the woman is the helper of man in the marriage relationship. I think you have in Genesis 2 the paradigm of marriage. Not all male-female relationships may be read into this verse. It is very important that we understand the mutuality of the help that the companionship of marriage is for so that marriage encompasses several purposes. I think we must say foremost is the union of the couple in a sexually complementary companionship—the design for emotional and erotic fulfillment. That is what it is for. The Hebrew for “corresponding to him” is “opposite to him.” The best way to visualize it is to think of your two hands in which they are obviously both hands. They are equal in terms of their identity as hands, but they face one another and so there is a difference within that likeness. The emphasis in Genesis 2 is on the humanity of Eve rather than the difference. The difference is there, of course, but it is a complementary difference. She is a complementary human being who comes to Adam in his aloneness. The narrative goes on to describe the parade of all the animals before Adam. He names them all but does not find any of them to be corresponding to him. Then God creates Eve. When the Lord presents Eve to Adam, the first human words on record are, “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” The emphasis falls on the sameness of the humanity of the woman—the basis for this mutual help and companionship.

There is a good bit in the Scriptures about the emotional and erotic fulfillment that marriage is designed for. I think that one place to observe it is in 1 Corinthians 7. It is also in the book of Proverbs and several passages of the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul has some important things to say about this. He is responding to questions they have given. He says, “Now, concerning the matters for which you wrote: It is well for a man not to touch a woman”—this was a euphemism for sexual intercourse. It seems that the question they had asked was, “Is it good for a man to abstain from sexual intercourse?” Remember, Paul is citing their question to him. Theoretically he says that that is okay but since there is so much immorality (so much *pornea*), each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. This is talking about sexual intercourse within marriage. Paul encourages that reciprocal relationship. He says, “The wife’s body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.” There is absolute parity in terms of Paul’s theology of sexual intercourse. It is rather remarkable when you think of it in terms of our usual image that you get of Paul. It is the absolute parity that is involved there. So he said, “Do not deprive each other.” He does qualify it by saying, “except perhaps by mutual consent for a time so you may devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command.” The thought seems to be that we may abstain from sexual intercourse for a while within marriage. But Paul cautiously says, “But it has to be by mutual consent.” One partner does not just go off on a spiritual high and leave the other partner frustrated. So, there must be mutual consent for a time, and it has to be limited. This is not open-ended. Do not think that you can be married without sexual intercourse on an open-ended basis. It ought to be for a particular spiritual purpose, not simply an aesthetic proving something to yourself. Rather, it is to devote yourselves to prayer, without the distraction of sexual intercourse. Paul says, “I say this as a concession.” In essence, he is saying, “Yes, you may do that, but come together again.” This points to how central the fulfillment of sexual intercourse within the marriage is as the most intimate part of the companionship of husband and wife. Of course, companionship is more than that. The “one flesh” relationship is more than that. But that is its focal point. That is its unique unity feature that belongs exclusively within marriage. Non-marital intercourse is wrong because it has a uniting feature without a life-uniting intent, which is God’s will for the “one flesh” relationship.

I think that the 16th Century recovered the idea of companionship being the first purpose of marriage. It has taken longer for the Roman Catholic Church to adopt that purpose, but in *Humanae Vitae*, the famous encyclical on contraception, they do place that now alongside procreation as the purpose of marriage. The purpose is unity and then procreation. Cranmer wanted that to be placed first in the English prayer book. He did not get his way, but the Westminster divines did make that revision and listed as the first purpose, “the mutual help of husband and wife.” Marriage is more than a companionship as though it would be totally the vocation for companionship. That would give license to self-absorption, and that is not biblical. I think that it is right to see marriage also as a partnership that the couple now is called together to serve in three ways. First of all, they are called to procreate. That is under God’s control. To be fruitful and multiply is His blessing—His super-added blessing to the marriage. It is under His will, but it is something that normally couples long for and desire to have. Not all couples can procreate. Therefore, they often adopt in order to have that fulfillment of the family. The partnership and procreation come about through the sexual union of the couple according to God’s design. I have to say the couple now, because of their union in one flesh, are called not only to fulfill the procreation mandate together but also the dominion mandate, “Be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth and rule over it.” That cultural mandate was to bring out of the creation all the rich potentialities God has placed in it in every spiritual service. The couple appears as partners in that dominion mandate. In the Eastern church, as a part of the wedding ceremony, there is a ceremony of the crowns. They hold up crowns over the heads of the bride and groom. It is an interesting ceremony. It symbolizes that Adam and Eve are the king and queen of creation. It follows that dominion mandate now as a couple. On our wedding day, we are all kings and queens and in fulfillment of what God has designed for us as the partnership of a couple.

The couple’s partnership serves the Great Commission. It serves it first of all in bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, either by biological children or through adoption. Beyond that, especially in the New Testament, you see that the home becomes a center for mission activity. Think of all the couples who open their homes for church meetings in the New Testament. It seems just a natural transition. Priscilla and Aquila are the prominent of those. The couples appear in Scripture in the New Testament especially as involved in missions as joint heirs of the grace of life. They not only communicate that grace to their children, but they also (as they have opportunity) use their home in the furtherance of God’s special purposes in redemption through fulfillment of the Great Commission. That is a part of what it means to be “one flesh.” It is also why Paul discourages marriage outside the faith. He says, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” The most important thing of our “one flesh” relationship is our Christian identity. When we find ourselves becoming Christians with a partner who does not also become a Christian, Paul specifically says, “Do not divorce.” We will come back to that next time, but if the unbeliever is willing to live together then do not divorce. Marriage is meaningful. Such marriages are meaningful and serve God’s purposes—particularly in procreation. The children are holy. The believing partner is to bring them up in the Lord, but Paul discourages taking on that unequal yoke in order that the full vocation of marriage may be fulfilled.

I have been asked whether it is adequate to say Paul discourages marriage with unbelievers. No, his wording is stronger. He forbids it. The point Jesus makes about this is that this covenantal union means that they are no longer two. They now must always be regarded as a pair. A pair is something that both parts are indispensable. You do not work without the other. A pair of scissors is the best illustration of what a pair is. In that sense, they are no longer two but one. A pair of scissors has two parts, but they cannot do what scissors are supposed to do unless they are both joined together. I think that is probably the best illustration of what it means to be no longer two but one. They function as a couple, particularly in the threefold vocation of procreation, dominion, and mission. It is the union in one flesh that begins in sexual intercourse, but it is broader than sexual intercourse. The flesh stands for our whole lives in this

world. We are united in one flesh so that all aspects of our lives are now approached as a couple. We mutually condition one another in every aspect of life and the whole thing is a life in common. Frustration comes in the marriage when parts of my life are exclusive as though those were my private rooms that my partner does not have any right to enter and that I do not share with her. However, the “one flesh” is everything and now works together. We appear as a couple always.

The question was asked, “What is an appropriate public declaration of a marriage?” That depends on the culture. Cultures do it in different ways. So whatever cultural form is recognized in a given society would be the way to do it. In America, marriages must be registered with the Justice of the Peace or with the marital registry of the state. Marriages can be performed by various persons who have the authority to do so by the state, but then they are registered. It can be done by a pastor or by a Justice of the Peace. Different cultures do it in different ways so we are not locked into just one form of public declaration. It is something that is socially recognized. I have heard the argument that Isaac took Rebekah into his tent, and that was it so that is all you need to be married. Well, it was a socially recognized form that was preceded by the arrangements that were made in an arranged marriage. Everybody knew what the deal was. To read into that and think that living together is sufficient confuses living together with the public form of recognition. In our tradition, a couple may marry themselves if there are no third parties around and it is considered a marriage. On the frontier, the Reformed Presbyterians legitimized that marriage, but they said, “When you get to where it can be registered, it should be followed through with good social order.” But there is hardly ever a need for that now, at least in this society. What makes a marriage is the personal commitment to it. My point is, for third parties to be able to recognize that, you have to tell us what it is you are doing. It is true. The personal commitment is the key thing. We ought to instruct folks about what they are committing themselves to when they are committing to marriage. There is no way third parties can know how to treat folks unless they tell us. And to register with the state is the way we do it in this environment.

There are various complications that arise. In Chile (although they may have changed this), they had very strict laws of remarriage after you divorced for any reason. Many Christians in our circles have divorced on biblical grounds—narrow biblical grounds—and wanted to remarry. I consulted with them on that. They could not be legally remarried in the eyes of the state. It is an anomaly because you cannot be married by the state, but you can register instead of just living together, which is what Christian couples were doing because they could not get married. I told them to go to the elders and make a declaration recorded in the minutes. Then there is no question what the status of the couple is in the eyes of the church.

The question has been asked, “Would you encourage an unmarried believer who was living with someone to marry that person, even if that person was an unbeliever?” We must not forget the principle of progressive revelation. There is progressive responsibility, not that the responsibility was not already there, the clearer it becomes. In the New Testament teaching, with progressive revelation there comes progressive sanctification, progressive responsibility, and progressive grace. It all goes together. So, what is thinkable on the part of David, Abraham, and Jacob has now become unthinkable. If there is an implicit commitment, you have to be aware of that. I think that generally speaking, we would not encourage a believer in a live-in situation to marry an unbeliever. What if there are children? I do not want to make a blanket statement either way. I think you do have to judge in terms of the circumstances. In some cases, it may be the man who has become a Christian and who has led this woman into this relationship. Then it could be very unjust for him to say, “Well, you are not a Christian, but I am. Bye.” So, you have to judge on circumstances.

My fourth point is on family roles. You have a family as a structured institution, and we do not start out from scratch in terms of role relationships. There is, first of all, roles of the husband and wife. These terms denote sub-vocations within marriage by which conjugal responsibility is equitably distributed between the marriage partners in view of their gender complementation. This gets to be highly controversial in our society, as you well know. However, the biblical way it works out is that God has ordained two complementary ways of bearing His image, neither of which is superior to the other. So role relationship in marriage does not imply natural superiority and inferiority. As we reject white supremacy, so we reject male supremacy. The idea is that males have the right to dominate based on the dogma of sexual superiority. There is a unique perspective on marriage in that husbands and wives are companions and partners having the same humanity, sharing the same salvation, and serving the same kingdom. But I would say they hold distinct offices for the sake of the joint marriage enterprise. I define an office as “a God given responsibility with reference to one of His ordained social institutions for the sake of its proper functioning.”

The text on the mutual responsibility of husbands and wives is Ephesians 5:21 and following. It is in the context of mutual subordination—that is, mutual deference to one another. But even within that, there is a leadership role that is given to the husband that is embodied in the term “head” or *kephale*. This kind of leadership goes back to what I read at the beginning from Augustine. Paul does not say, “Husbands, rule your wives.” That is the important thing. Instead he says, “Husbands love your wives.” Whatever responsibility the man is given, he is given as the first among equals. It is to be exercised according to Philippians 5 in sacrificial love for the well-being of his wife to ensure her marital happiness. Rather than the patriarchal sense of rule and dominance, there is the rightful use of authority to serve others, and that service is for the wife. Actually, there is a reference to this in Deuteronomy 24 where a newly married man is excused from military and other social service for a whole year in order to bring happiness to the wife he has married. She is not his plaything. He is there for her happiness. The Old Testament, the most patriarchal part of the Scriptures, still gives that role to the husband to ensure the wife’s marital happiness. I think if we understand that the Lord uses offices to focus responsibility and to hold the husband accountable for the overall provision and direction of the marriage, it secures for the wife certain freedoms, especially the freedom necessary to fulfill the uniquely feminine role of childbearing with all of its hazards and demands. So the wife is asked in this reciprocal role relation in Ephesians 5 to respect her husband; that is, to respect him in terms of the office that he has in providing that kind of leadership, overall direction, and provision for the family. Husbands, love your wives. Put as your top priority her marital happiness. Wives, respect your husband, knowing that he has a role to fulfill.

We should not think of stereotyping or of a particular model of how this is going to work out for individual couples. This is for the couple to work out in terms of their gifts, opportunities, and so forth in terms of the distribution of labor within the family, the way things are worked out, and how the children are cared for. Much has developed in recent years as we have allowed folks to have that individual liberty to flourish according to who they are as a couple. It is the idea of flexibility within a structure that is the key to having an authentically biblical view of this that does not impinge upon the headship model and takes into account that there are equals. A man would be foolish not to consult with his wife in terms of those decisions that affect the family. Jesus says to his disciples, “You are my friends, not servants. A servant does not know what his master is doing.” A master makes his plans and tells his servant what to do. That is not the model for marriage. It is a partnership, a genuine legitimate partnership in which everything has to be open and responsibly approached. I think we are learning that in our generation. My sons are much better than I was in terms of understanding the authentic biblical model for marriage, and I think that there is hope in the younger generation, frankly, in terms of developing this. But it needs to be worked out. A head of household responsibility is to seek the

contribution and gifts of everyone in the household. That is the kind of leadership that is to be exercised so that everyone functions according to his or her gifts, abilities, and opportunities. And I think there is a transfer of that into the church. If the model of the church is male leadership, the male leadership ought to be exercised to foster the gifts of all the persons that are in the church. It is clear that the women are gifted for ministry and it is the responsibility of the leadership of the church to ensure that those gifts are exercised to their fullest extent within the body of Christ. The idea of Ephesians 5 and the role relationship of husband and wife are complementary role relationships that are derived from our creation as male and female. It should not lead us to a kind of cult of domesticity that leaves women out of the wider parts of the dominion mandate. It is a matter of balancing these three together for an individual couple: how it relates to procreation (bringing children in to the world), joint dominion over the earth for the glory of God in terms of the gifts that have been given, and our participation in the ongoing commission of the church. Families are going to look different according to their different gifts and opportunities, but if we take the full marriage vocation seriously, then our family roles should reflect the vocation of companionship/partnership. It can look very different in terms of individual couples.

The other role relationship is, of course, parents and children. The biblical idea of parenthood is not just in the transmission of biological life. That is only the beginning. As God uses the sexual union of the couple to create new life, so He ordains the family to be the sphere in which that new life is protected and nourished. This is why non-marital parenting places children in an extremely disadvantaged position. This is a structural area that we need to attend to—the great increase in intentional single parenting. We do not want to lump all single parents together. Some are not single parents by choice. Some single women in particular are heroic in the way in which they go about balancing their work and the care of their children. It is the intentional bringing children into the world outside of marriage that almost always increases the likelihood of poverty and other aspects of their welfare being impinged upon. We need to uphold the biblical ideal as more and more empirical evidence comes in that this is not good for children. We need to especially set an example in the church.

The key text on parental responsibility is Deuteronomy 6:4-7. I think that with respect to the social issues, we should be very cautious about eroding home care by getting childcare outside the home. If we increase the tax burden on persons who believe the home environment is really the best place to raise children (which it certainly is in terms of all the evidence that is there), then there is a structural dimension that we need to be very much aware of in the movement for tax-supported childcare. It sounds good. It sounds like something we ought to do, but it undermines home care, which is the most important. It is not just for persons to be at a disadvantage for taking care of their own children in their home or of their extended family in home care. Education is another issue where the parents' right to the education of their children is affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is one of those principles that is there, yet we have a very difficult time in America of getting justice for parents who want choice in terms of the schools they expose their children to or for parents who would prefer to have their children be in a religious (or for us, a Christian) environment. That is another area of structural reform. There is much more that needs to be expanded in terms of the social value and the family. It is not something that we can afford to let others define for us. We need to be active in terms of upholding the biblical ideal of what the family regarding parents and children. The purpose of parental guidance is to bring children to a point where they will be able to make their own decisions. So there comes a point where either through marriage or adult age that a child is no longer under the adult authority of his parents in terms of obedience, but rather it shifts to more of a mutual relationship. It is then that the reciprocal responsibility (showing affection and caring for parents as they grow older) takes hold. Parents have cared for us when we were helpless. As our parents become helpless, it is our responsibility to minister to them in their need.