

Five
Lies of Our
Anti-Christian
Age



Rosaria
Butterfield

Foreword by Kevin DeYoung

“The world is always trying to replace Christianity with a spiritual counterfeit that is another religion entirely, as J. Gresham Machen pointed out a century ago. Rosaria Butterfield exposes today’s ideologies that seek to force the church into the mold of sexual perversion and self-deification. And she reminds us in this well-written and easy-to-read book that the answer to these soul-destroying lies remains the same as it always was: knowing and abiding in God’s word so that the truth will set us free. Highly recommended!”

Joel R. Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary,
Grand Rapids, Michigan

“In a culture marked by sexual confusion and moral chaos, Rosaria Butterfield bursts through the fog of confusion with unflinching clarity. Defining words like *male* and *female*, and the biblical roles assigned to them, this book speaks plainly and unapologetically about the beauty of God’s design and purpose for gender, sex, marriage, and family. If the five lies of our anti-Christian age she confronts are like idols in Daniel’s Babylon, be inspired to join Butterfield as she, like Daniel’s three friends, stand amongst the thousands of bended knees and boldly assert, ‘We will not serve your gods.’”

Alisa Childers, Host, *The Alisa Childers Podcast*, author, *Another Gospel?*
and *Live Your Truth and Other Lies*

“Falsehood abounds not only in the world but also, sadly, in the church. The truth must attack the lies of the age for the sake of God’s honor and glory, the good of people, and the health of the church. In this deeply courageous book, Rosaria Butterfield addresses topics that many are afraid to confront and expose. On the one hand, this is grievous, but I am especially grateful for the gifts God has given to Butterfield, who is in many respects uniquely able to expose these five lies of our anti-Christian age. You may weep reading this book, but I am convinced you will also rejoice.”

Mark Jones, Senior Pastor, Faith Presbyterian Church, Vancouver,
British Columbia

“As I read this cogent, trenchant, and timely declaration of gospel sanity, I was constantly reminded of the words of Christ: ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32). Rosaria Butterfield has afforded us a much-needed caveat to the prevailing untruths of our day while simultaneously redirecting us to the pathway of freedom.”

George Grant, Pastor, Parish Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee;
author, *The Micah Mandate*

“Rosaria Butterfield has written a landmark book on the lies our culture is rapidly adopting regarding sexuality, what she calls ‘the idol of our time,’ namely LGBTQ+ ideology. In all the subjects she raises—in particular feminism, homosexuality, and transgenderism—her treatments are broad, deep, and fair. She offers profound, and deeply convincing, reflections on Christian spiritual issues of temptation, sin, envy, and modesty, as well as the doctrines of the Scriptures and ecclesiology. As a converted lesbian, now a committed pastor’s wife and mother, no one is better placed to cover this material than Butterfield. Her book will surely go down as a classic.”

Peter Jones, Executive Director, truthXchange

“A timely and vital exhortation to the church, this book is a much-needed resource for Christians facing ever-increasing confusion in the world. With clear, biblical truth, Rosaria Butterfield cuts through key lies of our current culture, which have crept into the church like the serpent in the garden. This is a must-read!”

Becket Cook, author, *A Change of Affection*; Host, *The Becket Cook Show*

“Rosaria Butterfield speaks the truth in love, exposing and refuting five big lies widely accepted in our culture. She draws on her profound understanding of the Bible as well as her wide reading and personal experiences. May this important book strengthen Christians and be used to call many, not only to the truth but also to repentance and faith in Christ.”

W. Robert Godfrey, President Emeritus and Professor Emeritus,
Westminster Seminary California; Teaching Fellow,
Ligonier Ministries

“Rosaria Butterfield is one of those rare individuals who lives out her convictions with utter consistency—earlier as a lesbian professor of feminist and queer studies and now as a Christian and a pastor’s wife. In this book, she confronts some of the most pervasive falsehoods of our age.”

Nancy Pearcey, Professor and Scholar in Residence,
Houston Christian University; author, *Love Thy Body* and
The Toxic War on Masculinity

“Few authors consistently write books with such clarity and power, rightly dividing the primary issues of the day, like Rosaria Butterfield. Drawing from her unlikely conversion, literary eloquence, philosophical fluency, and theological mastery, she has again composed another tour de force in *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*. Addressing identity, sexuality, feminism, and transgenderism, this masterpiece uncovers the deceptive lies infiltrating the church and points to the life-giving and timeless truth of God’s word. Like a watchman on a wall, Butterfield grounds her courage and passion in her love for neighbor. Will we take the wide road of compromise leading to death or the narrow path of suffering leading to life in Christ? Read this book. You will not be pampered but challenged. Most of all, expect that the gospel of Christ will be exalted without any wavering to the left or the right.”

Christopher Yuan, speaker; author, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*;
creator, *The Holy Sexuality Project* video series

“With surgical precision, Rosaria Butterfield names, assesses, and dismantles the secular religion of our time. She makes the agenda of the enemy before us come into razor-sharp focus. But she doesn’t stop there. Like any good surgeon, after dismantling the cancer, she sews the patient back up—in this case, demonstrating how to battle lies with the truth. *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age* is a handbook for how to use God’s word to fight joyfully against an often baffling world around us.”

Summer Jaeger, Cohost, *Sheologians*

“In *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*, Rosaria Butterfield is doing the good work of ‘destroying arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God’ and of ‘taking every thought captive to obey Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:5). As a result, this book is a punch in the mouth to the reigning worldly ideologies of our day, and Butterfield is like Jael with warm milk and a tent peg. Butterfield pulls no punches but boldly confronts five lies that are bedeviling God’s people, and she faithfully refutes those lies with biblical truth. While this book will be edifying for all believers, Butterfield sets her sights on warning women in particular. Butterfield has a gift for saying hard things in profound and incisive ways. This is a powerful book that confronts the conceits of our age, and I cannot recommend it highly enough.”

Denny Burk, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; President, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood;
Teaching Pastor, Kenwood Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky

“In *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*, Rosaria Butterfield takes a wrecking ball not only to the obvious lies of modern culture but even more to the comfortable Christianese shibboleths we thoughtlessly mouth because we’ve heard so many others in church repeating them. They are the most dangerous deceptions of all. And the challenge running through every chapter of this book is this: choose this day whom you will believe—the word of God or the accommodationist counterfeits. Keep your highlighter handy—you will be reaching for it constantly.”

Megan Basham, Culture Reporter, *The Daily Wire*; author, *Beside Every Successful Man*

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Rosaria Butterfield

Foreword by Kevin DeYoung

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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*For Will and Hope Roberts,
faithful Christian friends who have raised their daughters,
Grace Bennett and Faith Roberts, to fear God, not man.
This book could not have been written without your witness, courage,
kindness, friendship, prayers, advice, and countless meals.
We live as the church militant until we join with the church
triumphant upon the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
I am grateful that our Lord gave us marching orders together.
Revelation 19:11–13*

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:

*KING OF KINGS AND
LORD OF LORDS.*

REVELATION 19:11-16 (NKJV)

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Foreword

THE DEVIL IS A LIAR.

And not just any old liar, a very good one. He normally avoids direct assaults. He prefers deceit, and misdirection. Think of the snake in the garden of Eden, merely *suggesting* that God's word might not be fully trustworthy. The devil specializes in traps and snares (2 Tim. 2:26). He masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). He blinds the minds of unbelievers (4:4). Our enemy, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, is wicked, tricky, and false (Rev. 12:9). He is a father of lies (John 8:44).

The devil lies to us in many ways. He may not speak through a snake, but he knows how to make his voice heard. Sometimes he may bring something directly to mind. Or perhaps he keeps us from seeing and hearing what we should. More often, I imagine, he speaks through the half-truths and quarter-truths we find in a thousand movies, television shows, and "news" reports. His voice can be heard in our universities and from the halls of power. If we listen carefully, we may detect his slithering speech in Christian books and in spiritual blogs, even from pastors and churches.

That is why the book you are holding is so important. Make no mistake, this courageous book is bracing. You won't agree with

every sentence. But it is hard to imagine anyone who shouldn't listen to what Rosaria has to say. Strike that—not what Rosaria has to say, but what God has said that Rosaria knows we need to hear. Rosaria Butterfield is a friend of mine, and she is eager to speak to you as a friend too—if you will let her. She is smart, caring, self-deprecating, and—here's one thing I hope you'll learn to love—in a world awash in soft heads and brittle hearts, Rosaria isn't afraid to tell you what she really thinks. May her tribe increase.

There is a war raging between good and evil in our world, and though we might prefer the conflict to be fought somewhere else, we don't get to pick the times in which we live. The front lines today are battles over sex, gender, and identity. We must be ready for a fight in precisely these places. Don't underestimate the power of your opponent. The devil wants us to join him in his rebellion against God. He wants to make us cowards and traitors. He wants us to believe the myth of our own autonomy. He wants us to raise the white flag and side with the enemy—the enemy without or the enemy within, it doesn't matter to him. The devil hates every spiritual blessing in Christ. He hates Christ's power. He hates Christ's forgiving grace. He hates Christ's transforming grace. He hates the gospel and the church. He hates happy marriages and well-ordered families. He hates personal holiness and obedience. The devil hates Christians who stand their ground.

Have you ever noticed the central command for the Christian as he conducts spiritual warfare? Read over the passage in Ephesians 6 on the armor of God. The exhortation is not to cast out demons or bind territorial spirits. The command, repeated several times, is simply “stand” (vv. 11, 13, 14). Don't give up. Don't give in. Don't back down. It's as if Christ our captain is yelling out instructions

to his troops: “Hold your lines, men! Don’t break ranks. Stand your ground!”

And how do we stand? It’s quite simple really. We live by truth, not by lies. There are five implements in the armor of God that are defensive: a belt, a breastplate, shoes, a shield, and a helmet. There is one offensive weapon, a sword. All six pieces of armor are meant to reinforce the same two things: the truth about God and the truth about ourselves. That’s how wise Christians have always done battle with the devil. That’s how the fight must be fought in our day.

The devil says to us, “If God is a God of love, how can he judge? You have nothing to fear if you sin.” But with the belt of truth, hear God’s voice saying, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

And when the devil accuses us of falling short of the glory of God, we stand ready with the breastplate of righteousness, knowing that God “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

And when the evil one bids us to walk in resentment and bitterness with our brothers and sisters, we will not follow, because our feet are fitted with the gospel of peace, knowing that Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (Eph. 2:14).

And when the devil comes with his enticements to sin, we will take up the shield of faith and will choose, like Moses, to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time (Heb. 11:25).

And when Satan tries to convince us that God is unwilling to save us or unable to change us, we will trust that the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and they are safe (Prov. 18:10).

And when Satan tells us that we are hopeless, that sanctification is hopeless, and that endurance is hopeless, we will strike back with the sword of the Spirit. “No, Satan, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). I am dead to sin and alive in Christ by the Spirit (8:10). I do not consider the sufferings of this present time worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed (8:18). We have hope for what we do not see, and we will wait for it with patience (8:25). The Spirit will help us in our weakness and intercede for us with groanings too deep for words (8:26). We know that for those who love God all things work together for good (8:28). We believe that if God is for us, no one can stand against us (8:31). We believe that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (8:37) and that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:38–39).”

Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age has everything to do with the armor of God, because this book is a book about truth—truth you may have never heard, truth you may have forgotten, or truth you already know but haven’t dared to embrace. Don’t follow the great dragon; that’s what this book is about. He has already been defeated. Follow the one who *is* truth (John 14:6). Listen to him. Love him. Learn from him. Do not fall for the lies of our age. Stand your ground.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

*Senior Pastor, Christ Covenant Church,
Matthews, North Carolina*

Preface

THIS BOOK IS FOR CHRISTIANS, especially Christian women, who aren't ashamed of the Bible and its teachings—or who are and want to change. For young married women, my hope is that this book will encourage you to press on in holy faith and living. For young single women, I hope that you will aspire to be faithful and fruitful Christian wives, that is, to be helpers, wise counselors, and devoted homemakers to a godly man raising children to the glory of God. For older single and married women, my hope is that you will take up your role of honor as spiritual mothers to young women in the church.

Making the honor of the Christian family your priority and serving the Christian family with your life and your time is not some domestic cop-out. Indeed, it is part of how the great promise of Revelation 11:15 comes into focus: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

This book is for those who know that marriage between a man and a woman is sacred and cannot be modified to appeal to cultural whims. We didn't make this sacred covenant, and we can't remake it. This book is for Christians with loved ones trapped in lesbian

relationships and transgender confusion who know that helping them requires staying connected without joining them in their indoctrination. Only because we serve a God who can be truly known can we stay connected to lost loved ones and be of any godly use. We are of no good to God or our loved ones if we believe the lies the culture feeds us about what it means to be a man or a woman.

This book is for Christians not embarrassed by the Bible and its teaching on women's roles and callings. An unbreakable biblical logic connects God's design for men and women, God's standards for sexual behavior, and the Bible's teaching on sex roles in the family, church, and world. God created men and women in marriage to do different and complementary things: husbands lead, protect, and provide, and wives submit, nurture, and keep the home.

Because Satan would like you to think that my previous sentence is conspiratorial hate speech, strong Christian women need to know what the Bible says on this matter rather than what some famous almost-Christian feminist blogger says on Twitter. In fact, being wise in Scripture and ignorant of Twitter may be the first step. Of course, being a helpmate, wise counselor, and homemaker are not our only responsibilities—many others fill each day. When our obligations give us public positions in the world, we seek to conduct ourselves as godly women in these public spheres (as did the famed Proverbs 31 woman). But some of us believe, as I do, that God's design for women determines our roles and our priorities. The Christian family matters, and its neglect is deadly.

The covenant blessing that God gives to married women with children extends to unmarried or childless women in the church who support this high calling. We are the body of Christ, under the covenant of grace, and if our priorities are in order, God will bless us, all of us, with no second-class citizens or people left out or

passed over. This does not mean that all Christian women will be married; it does mean that all Christian women who value biblical marriage and childbearing and rearing will be blessed.

Finally, for those women who have loved ones lost for now and held in the grips of our nation's reigning idol, a formidable monolith represented by the letters LGBTQ and the symbol +, this book intends to arm you with God's words of courage, comfort, and boldness so that you may pray without ceasing. My prayer is that you will stay indestructibly connected to your loved one without falling victim to the indoctrination that has bewitched her. If *bewitched* seems like a strong word, listen to how the apostle Paul puts it: "Some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared" (1 Tim. 4:1–2). Innovations to the gospel are more accurately understood as false teaching. Nothing good comes from this.

My prayer is that our generation would be known for faithful prayer, fervent worship, diligent church membership, and sacrificial hospitality, blessed by and magnified by the Holy Spirit. May your faith fail not, and may you see your loved one restored to truth and to Christ.

Introduction

We All Live in Babel Now

*The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.*

ISAIAH 40:8

YOU TREK DOWN THE STEPS and onto the street, heading toward the big warehouse grocery store, favorite coffee mug in hand, two youngest children in tow. “Bigot!” “Hater!” These are the words that greet you as soon as your feet hit the sidewalk. You look around, wondering who was just shouting these accusations and to whom. In utter disbelief, you realize that the shouter was a brother in the Lord. And he was angrily yelling at you. Brothers and sisters are clashing with each other in hurt, confusion, and rage—right here on Main Street. Fingers are pointing, and accusations are flying high and hard. And these people aren’t outsiders—they are members of your tribe. All around you, people are bustling around in self-righteousness and scornful disdain.

Seemingly overnight, a civil war within Christianity has broken out.

You arrive at the grocery warehouse emotionally exhausted.

You hoist your little ones into the grocery cart seat, hand each one a snack cup with Cheerios, pull out your membership card, and flash it to the check-in girl. “Thank you, Miss,” you say while entering the colossal warehouse through the electronics section. Mountainous TV screens cover the walls, and you try to adjust your eyes to the glare. On one screen, you witness a news reporter shoving a microphone under a beleaguered mom’s chin and posing a cheeky question in a language you faintly recognize. The reporter appears to speak English but uses words and phrases like *intersectionality* and *gay Christianity*. The reporter keeps using the second-person plural (*they*) to refer to a singular subject (*he* or *she*), which only serves to proliferate your confusion and disorientation.

Suddenly, you realize that the check-in girl is trying to get your attention. You check your pocketbook for your membership card, thinking maybe you dropped it, and she is kindly trying to return it. It turns out that’s not why she is running toward you. She is shaking her fists in rage. “I go by the pronouns *he* and *him!*” the girl shouts over the din of the TVs.

“Your heteronormativity abuses me!” Her face is contorted with anger and rage.

What is *heteronormativity*, you wonder?¹

As if she read your mind, the reporter speaks directly to the camera: “We are on a full-scale war against heteronormativity, the horrific belief that heterosexuality is normal.”

You smile at your daughters, trying to draw their attention away from the blaring TV. You ponder the word *heteronormativity* as you esteem your daughters’ dark brown eyes, something they inherited

1 Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is an abusive form of social control and manipulation, not the natural order of the created world.

from your husband. Ruminating on whether a second cup of coffee would help, you try to understand what is not normal about a husband and a wife and the children God graciously gives them.

What kind of culture goes to war against this?

You hurry past the newscast because your three-year-old notices *Blue's Clues* on the next big screen and wants to get out of the cart and dance and sing along. Something seems off as you draw near, and that's when you notice it. The show's title is "Blue's Clues Pride Parade Sing-Along Featuring Nina West."² You had no idea that the fluffy blue dog, beloved by preschoolers everywhere, hung out with drag queens. Your toddler is spellbound. Rushing past Ru Paul's protégé at full tilt, you find yourself at the foot of another gay performance, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus performing "A Message from the Gay Community." It contains the haunting refrains "We're coming for your children" and "We'll convert your children."³ This one really takes you aback. The lead tenor, with his foppish eyebrows and sinister smirk, signals that, well, yes, he really is coming for your children. As the other members of this large choir combine voices for the crescendo, you realize that now you are the one spellbound.⁴ You didn't know that gay men joke so openly these days about pedophilia.⁵ Back in ancient history, like, five years ago, that would have hit a little too close to home.

2 "The Blue's Clues Pride Parade Sing-Along Ft. Nina West," accessed March 9, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

3 "Video excerpts from the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus," July 1, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

4 Becket Cook provides a most insightful analysis of this in "We'll Convert Your Children," *The Becket Cook Show*, episode 3, accessed September 7, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

5 The San Francisco Gay Men's Choir released a statement excusing this video as parody, and this is at best a half-truth. It is more accurate to categorize it under the genre of persuasion: it seeks to persuade its listeners to sing and dance along in the normalization of homosexuality and transgenderism. Apparently, parental rights are the next pillar that gay male sexual

You exit electronics and head for the dry food section, and you have never been so relieved to see marshmallows in breakfast cereal in your entire life. You say yes to two large boxes when the children beg. You need only cereal, coffee, and bananas, so you scoot back home with your parcel and children. Nostalgia tugs hard at your heart. You ponder the past decade and its tumultuous metamorphosis.

This is real life, but it feels like you inhabit the pages of a dystopian novel. In sadness, you puzzle over the dethroned Christian luminaries and, with them, the parachurch ministries that once prominently featured those luminous names. Their heinous scandals serve as a stunning betrayal. You repent because you—and everyone around you—made heroes out of mere men and then watched them morph into heretics. Something sinister happened when you treated them like rock stars and started playing the groupie. And now that the genie is out of the bottle, there's no putting her back. Everything keeps changing, and even within your extended family, it feels like there is a spiritual civil war going on.

Welcome to our new world, where it feels like we are living at ground zero of the Tower of Babel.

The Tower of Babel

What does the Tower of Babel have to do with our current anti-Christian age? We read about the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:

expression intends to topple. Why do I reject the genre of parody for this musical work? Parody, like all literary genres, selects content carefully. In no time during the historic gay-rights movement would gay men so boldly and openly celebrate pedophilia. That was the dirty little secret that they wished to conceal because the LGBTQ+-rights movement has historically wanted to downplay gay male affiliation with known pro-pedophilia groups like the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA). After all, this kind of thing does not lend itself to the narrative that gay men are a victimized group in need of antibullying protection.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. (Gen. 11:1–9)

The fall of the Tower of Babel is an action-packed biblical story showcasing God’s powerful destruction of wicked men’s evil plans. The futility of man’s attempt to usurp God’s will and glory is on full display here. The people wanted to build a city with a great tower; instead, God scattered them, and they fled. The people were confident that their tower would reach heaven; instead, it was so insignificant that God stooped low to find it. Envious of God’s glory, the people wanted to make a great name and steal his glory for themselves; instead, they are known forever by God’s naming their city Babel—confusion.

In pride, mankind attempted to reach heaven by building a tower. They strived in their own strength to come to God. God would have none of this and destroyed the tower—it collapsed like a toddler’s Jenga stack.

From the biblical church’s point of view, God’s confusion of language and the scattering of his enemies was a good thing. Destroying the tower and confusing the language was God’s way of protecting his people from false leaders and teachers. After God destroyed the Tower of Babel, those who opposed God had an even harder time finding and making allies. When miscommunication confounds evil, God’s people see this as a blessing. But what does it mean when the chaos and confusion are within Christianity, not (only) external to it? “God is not a God of confusion,” declares 1 Corinthians 14:33. If my enemies are Christ’s enemies, and if Christ is not divided, why are enemy lines drawn within Christianity?

This book offers one simple answer: the world is in chaos, and the church is divided because we have failed to obey God and value his plan for how men and women should live. We foolishly believed that we could permanently extricate the gospel from the creation ordinance—that we could have the New Testament without the Old. We foolishly believed that personal piety and love for Jesus require no doctrinal integrity and no foundation in the Bible as God’s inerrant, sufficient, and inspired word. We foolishly believed that we could reinvent our calling as men and women, defy God’s pattern and purpose for the sexes, and somehow reap God’s blessing. God’s plan for men and women, the creation ordinance, is first found in Genesis 1. And it is central—not peripheral—to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Creation of Man and Woman

The creation of man and woman, also known as the “creation ordinance,” is central, not peripheral, to the gospel. Found in Genesis 1:27–28, the creation ordinance is God’s first covenant with man:

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

The creation ordinance rests on four matters:

- It is an ordinance (a law or an authoritative order).
- It is relational and noble: man made in God’s image, man and woman made for one another. Man “is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. . . . In the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God” (1 Cor. 11:7, 11–12).
- It establishes a gender *binary*. A binary is an entity with two portions that make up one whole. A gender binary means that humanity is one entity that exists in one of two parts: male and female. Male and female, created by God’s design for life on earth, will become male and female by God’s

design in our eternal state in either heaven or hell and in the new heavens and new earth.⁶ Adam’s sin distorts and mars the goodness of God’s created order, but it does not change what it means to be human.

- It reveals the rules and jobs given to Adam and Eve before the fall: marriage (between one man and one woman that features the life-giving blessing of children) and work (that requires stewarding the earth and having dominion over the creatures).

The creation ordinance not only describes how men and women are created distinctly and by God’s design; it defines what it means to be human. When we dispense with the wisdom of the creation ordinance, we abandon the standard of God’s intention for men and women, the purpose for masculinity and femininity, and the order that God has set for families and civilization.

The creation ordinance is also a covenant, a formal agreement between two parties and an obligatory declaration that is administered with sovereign seals and signs and blessings or curses. God created us to be in covenant with him. We were made for the covenant; the covenant was not an add-on after we roamed around for billions of years, presumably sprouting brains and legs.

Made in God’s Image

The creation ordinance declares that mankind is made *in* God’s image—not *as* God’s image.⁷ The image of God in us is not found

6 A helpful summary of what happens to people—believers and unbelievers—when we die is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 32, “Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead”; and in chapter 33, “Of the Last Judgment.” G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 328–46.

7 Joel Beeke, “The Image of God,” in *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 1733.

in the flesh of our human body, for God is “a most pure Spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions.”⁸ This means that as striking as the Sistine Chapel is, the image of God is not found on its ceiling in Michelangelo’s artistry. That is merely crude paganism, beautiful and arresting as it may be.

If God’s love for mankind is revealed in his creation of man and woman in his image, where do we find God’s image in man? What exactly does it mean to be made in God’s image? An image of yourself is what you see when you stand in front of a mirror. God is the object in the biblical creation account, and we are the reflection. Therefore, to reflect God’s image accurately, we need to look at him through the mirror of the word of God illuminated through the Holy Spirit.

To repeat, we are made not *as* God’s image but *in* God’s image. We reflect the image of God, not by inventing what he wants for us based on our feelings or independent ideas for our lives and futures, but by looking to God through his word and growing in the knowledge of God, the holiness of God, and the righteousness of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Our authenticity comes from God and not from our feelings. Joel Beeke writes, “When man fell into sin, knowledge gave way to ignorance, righteousness to iniquity, and holiness to ungodliness.”⁹ God is holy, and therefore ignorance, iniquity, and ungodliness reflect our sin nature in Adam. The good news of the gospel is that when we put our trust in Christ and walk in his love and his commands, God’s image in man is restored in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. This restoration process proceeds from the powerful word of God being grafted into a believing heart. Beeke describes the order by which God renews

8 Westminster Confession of Faith, 2:1.

9 Beeke, “Image of God,” 1733.

his image in man: “First, we must acquire knowledge of the truth, which is imparted through the preaching of the Word (James 1:21).” Next, we do the will of God (Ps. 15:1; 1 John 5:3). And, finally, we “consecrate ourselves, soul and body, to serving God with loving reverence and godly fear.”¹⁰

Male and Female

We are made in the image of God as *distinctly* men or women, and we are called to reflect that image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness *as men and as women*. Some aspects of the gospel life are universal to both men and women. For example, we are all called to repent of our sin, put our hope in Christ, and live obediently. But because our creational design is different, some aspects of obedience to God are different. Wives are called to obey their husbands in the Lord (1 Pet. 3:1). Qualified men only are called to be pastors and elders in the church (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Brothers and sisters in the Lord show their love to one another by not leading each other into temptation, which means women are to conduct themselves with modesty, and brothers are to protect their sisters’ reputations (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 1 Tim. 2:9). When we level creational differences between men and women, foolishly thinking that there is no vital difference between men and women, we disobey God. The disunity of our day reflects God’s cutting down to size the tower of gender and sexual confusion that we have foolishly built.

Why Do We All Live in Babel Now?

We all live in Babel now because people exchanged the truth for lies and have codified these lies into the law of the land. It’s a tragedy

¹⁰ Beeke, “Image of God,” 1733.

that we embrace lies because we don't remember the truth. Paul describes three "exchanges" of truth for lies in Romans 1:21–28.

First there is the exchange of the Creator for the creature, or the exchange of God worship for idol worship:

Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and *exchanged* the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Rom. 1:21–23)

Second is the exchange of truth for lies:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they *exchanged* the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom. 1:24–25)

Third comes the exchange of natural sexuality (heterosexuality) for dishonorable passions (homosexuality):

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women *exchanged* natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave

them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.
(Rom. 1:26–28)

These exchanges have a tragic order: (1) The exchange of the triune God for gods of our own making; (2) the exchange of truth for lies; (3) the exchange of the natural (heterosexuality) for the unnatural (homosexuality). A world that grows in its homosexuality and gender confusion is a world judged by God, given over to sin (Rom. 1:24), and increasingly barren and corrupt. I understand that this is not how people who call themselves “gay”—which I once did—understand the situation. But they would be better off if they did.

The world we inhabit is one that has completed all three exchanges in Romans 1. After these exchanges have been made, we are left with five lies that require biblical confrontation.

What are the five lies?

The Five Lies

Lie #1: Homosexuality is normal.

Included in this lie is the belief that homosexual orientation is true and immutable—fixed and never-changing. Homosexual orientation, a nineteenth-century Freudian invention (Sigmund Freud, 1856–1939), is an unbiblical category of personhood and an antagonist to the creation ordinance because it redefines sinful desire as something that defines who you are rather than how you feel. Lie #1 claims that the word of God doesn’t apply to homosexual orientation because homosexual orientation represents a person’s core truth. Some professing Christians believe that homosexual orientation is fixed, immutable (unchangeable), and part of God’s

creational and eternal plan. Some people believe that homosexuality is embedded in a person's identity.

We must ponder why God's attribute of immutability has been embraced by the LGBTQ+ movement as an attribute of homosexual orientation. God is immutable—God never changes. One theologian defines God's immutability as "that perfection in God whereby He is exalted above all."¹¹ But if you exchange the Creator for the creature, you impose God's attributes on man. When we hear "homosexual orientation is fixed and immutable—it never changes," this is only imaginable in a world that has already exchanged the worship of the Creator for the worship of the creature, of God for an idol. "Gay Christians" (an oxymoron if there ever was one) teach that you can't repent of who you are, how you feel, or even what you desire. They believe that homosexual orientation is morally neutral, separate from one's sin nature, cannot be repented of, and rarely changes over a person's lifetime. This is a lie.

Lie #2: Being a spiritual person is kinder than being a biblical Christian.

Unbiblical spirituality welcomes people exactly as they are or, at least, makes this promise. This is a religion that elevates being a "good" person over giving your life to Christ. To the unbiblically spiritual person, everything is one. Distinctions and hierarchies are called abusive, and true spirituality is supposedly found inside ourselves. This sort of spirituality, unbiblical spirituality, believes that everything in the universe supposedly shares in this divine power and unifying balance. Rules, divisions, and distinctions are violent, or so says the unbiblically spiritual person.

¹¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics: A System of Christian Theology*, trans. Richard Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 23.

In contrast, for the biblical Christian, there are two kinds of reality: God and creation. God is eternal, triune, personal, holy, loving, and separate from his creation. According to biblical spirituality, there are two kinds of people: those who love God and those who defy God. Even though we create our own problems by refusing to live by his laws, God provides the only solution through the Lord Jesus Christ. Pastor and theologian Peter Jones, founder of *TruthXchange*, offers the most helpful paradigm for comparing unbiblical spirituality to biblical spirituality.¹² While unbiblical spirituality self-promotes as kind and inclusive, it is in reality narcissistic and damning.¹³

Lie #3: Feminism is good for the world and the church.

Feminism began in 1792 with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. As its title suggests, it sought to "vindicate," which means "to assert one's right to possession." And what rights needed possessing? Women needed to possess the rights to citizenship. Wollstonecraft sought rights for education and voting for women. Feminism has gone through four "waves" or phases since 1792, with the most recent wave so tied to the LGBTQ+ movement that now, in 2023, we cannot even define what a woman is or defend her right to exist—least of all to be noted as a citizen.¹⁴ Feminism

12 "In one-ism, everything shares the same essence. In a word, everything is a piece of the divine. Two-ism believes that while all of creation shares a certain essence (everything apart from God is created), the Creator of nature, namely God, is a completely different being, whose will determines the nature and function of all created things." Peter Jones, *One or Two: Seeing a World of Difference, Romans 1 for the Twenty-First Century* (Np: Main Entry Editions, 2010), 17.

13 An unbiblically spiritual person becomes a narcissist with great ease. According to the *Huffington Post*, "Being a spiritual person is synonymous with being a person whose highest priority is to be loving yourself and others." Margaret Paul, "What Does It Mean to Be a Spiritual Person?," *HuffPost*, December 21, 2016, <https://www.huffpost.com/>.

14 Two incidents prove my point. First, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson refused to define what a woman is during her Supreme Court hearing (truly ironic given that she was selected because

in the world is passè—it has been displaced by transgenderism. Feminism in the evangelical church, however, is alive and well. When the church sets itself up to follow the world and not to lead it, it necessarily lingers long with discarded trends and affections. Adherents of feminism believe the Bible has no bearing on gender roles, responsibilities, or requirements because the idea of men and women being made by God’s design for God’s purposes on earth is old-fashioned, silly, dangerous, abusive, and culturally driven. Some professing Christian feminists believe that Adam’s headship is a consequence of the fall—and thus a sin. They claim that there is no biblical warrant for a married woman’s submission to her husband and elders or for elders and pastors to be qualified men. Bible verses that call for a wife to obey her husband in the Lord, such as Titus 2:4–5, 1 Peter 3:1, 5–6, and Colossians 3:18, are “contextualized” and then dismissed.¹⁵ Such feminists believe that feminism offers a corrective to Christianity because, without it, misogyny (the hatred of women) will run rampant with biblical

she is a black woman). See Jordan Boyd, “Judge Nominated to Supreme Court on the Basis of Her Sex Cannot Define Woman,” *The Federalist*, March 23, 2022, <https://thefederalist.com/>. Second, Lia Thomas, a biological man who swam for the prestigious University of Pennsylvania men’s swim team, came out this year as a trans woman and swam on the women’s team where he won the 2022 NCAA Swim Championship. Fourth-wave feminists heralded this as a great victory for trans women. Everyone else interpreted this rightly as the end of Title IX, women’s sports, and classical feminism. Brooke Migdon, “Lia Thomas: ‘Trans Women Are Not a Threat to Women’s Sports,’” *The Hill*, May 31, 2022, <https://thehill.com/>.

¹⁵ Brad Isbell, “Shall the Radical Contextualizers Win?,” *Heidelblog*, February 24, 2022, <https://heidelblog.net/>. This article speaks more to the subject of homosexuality than feminism but is the most useful articulation of radical contextualization. To “contextualize” a passage of Scripture is to understand its binding command as relevant only in the ancient context in which it was written. This raises some obvious problems. If the word of God is only true in an ancient context and not applicable or binding on people today, then the Bible cannot be my guide to faith and life. If you are a contextualist, then you tend to read the Bible for its “moral vision,” and you leave the concept of morality swinging in the wind of today’s values.

support. Without feminism to the rescue, they argue, the church will unwittingly promote sexual abuse by giving perpetrators extreme and unchecked power and spiritual abuse by prohibiting a woman from using her gifts of teaching from the pulpit and assuming the roles of pastor and elder. This is a lie.

Lie #4: Transgenderism is normal.

People who believe in what is called “gender fluidity” also believe that sexual difference has no biological or ontological (original and eternal) integrity. Transgenderism is supposedly as normal for some people as freckles and a blue sky on a North Carolina summer day. Transgenderism maintains that there are more than two biological sexes and even more genders. The year 2022 boasts seventy-two genders and seventy-eight gender pronouns.¹⁶ By the time you are reading this book, there may be ten thousand. What does this all mean? How did we get to a place in the United States where someone can walk into Planned Parenthood and, forty-five minutes later, leave with a prescription for powerful hormones that will leave her sterilized for life if taken over time?¹⁷ We got here by believing the lie that transgenderism is normal—at least for some people.

Lie #5: Modesty is an outdated burden that serves male dominance and holds women back.

People who believe this lie dismiss the virtue of modesty for Christian women. Having denied that men and women are different,

16 “What Are Some Different Types of Gender Identity?,” Medical News Today, accessed May 21, 2022, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/>.

17 “We offer gender affirming hormonal care for patients 18 years and older at all of our health centers. You don’t need to participate in therapy or provide information for a mental health provider to receive hormone therapy.” “Gender Affirming Hormone Care,” Planned Parenthood, accessed May 21, 2022, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>.

with different responsibilities, callings, and boundaries, those who reject modesty believe that calling women to a different standard of dress, speech, and conduct is oppressive. They deny that women owe their brothers the kindness of modesty. At the bottom of this is a feminist belief that it is not fair that women are different from men and that asking women to dress and behave with biblical modesty serves male dominance and holds women back. In the contemporary church climate, modesty has been replaced by exhibitionism.

Lies I Believed Even as a Christian

I want to confess right at the outset that I believed all of these lies as an unbeliever, but I continued to believe some of them for years into my Christian life. Because I know how sneaky and seductive each of these lies is, I needed to write this book. I woke up to realize that I was on the field running the ball in the wrong direction and wearing the wrong team colors.

1. Gender Dysphoria vs. Transgenderism and the Pronoun Question

For years, and even as a Christian, I used and defended what are called “preferred pronouns.” This means that for those who were diagnosed as gender dysphoric or those who viewed themselves as transgendered, I willingly used the pronoun “she” to refer to a biological man and the pronoun “he” to refer to a biological female. I falsely believed that this would aid and abet my ability to bring the gospel to bear on these people’s lives. I failed to distinguish between an illness (gender dysphoria) and an ideology (transgenderism). I falsely believed that this would be missional,

exemplifying a gracious willingness to meet a person where she was, step into her shoes, and do nothing to escalate the anxiety of an emotionally unstable person. And perhaps before preferred pronouns were coded into federal law, the danger and clarity of the situation wasn't as evident.

My reason for changing my mind can be stated in two words: *Obergefell* (as in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015) and *Bostock* (as in *Bostock v. Clayton County, CA*, 2020). Because of these two landmark Supreme Court cases, the former establishing gay marriage and the latter LGBTQ+ civil rights, we are no longer discussing terminology or vocabulary. Rather, we are talking about ideology and idolatry, which must be confronted in the case of the former and killed in the latter. After *Bostock*, we have nearly one hundred pediatric gender clinics in the US, when we used to have one. After *Bostock*, we have government schools putting LGBTQ+ propaganda in antibullying programs, where parents cannot exercise authority over their child by removing the child from them. After *Bostock*, we have ROGD (rapid-onset gender dysphoria) and nothing short of mass hysteria capturing the minds of our teenage girls. Christians must read the times. The gospel has been on a collision course with homosexual orientation and gender identity for about a decade, and the collision occurred in 2015 and 2020. During war, borders close. One border that must be closed to actual Christians is using people's preferred pronouns.

I have sinned in using transgender pronouns and claiming it as hospitable. I have come to see my use of "preferred" pronouns today as sin, pure and simple. Not only is it lying to people who are already being lied to by the world, but it also falsifies the gospel imperative of the creation ordinance, with its eternal binary of being created in the image of God as male or female and the command to live out that image-bearing within God-assigned sexual roles.

2. *Prioritizing LGBTQ+ Youth over the God Who Made Them*

My sin of lying against the creation ordinance through transgender pronouns reveals another sin: focusing on the girl lost to LGBTQ+ madness over the God who made her. By wanting to comfort the lost girl, I sinned in the pride that believed I could be more merciful than God. I sinned by using my personal experience over Scripture.

3. *Giving Biblical Meaning to LGBTQ+ Vocabulary*

My sin of prioritizing my personal history as a lesbian over Scripture bled into another sin—miscategorizing and then dismissing as dangerous all care efforts to promote healthy biblical sexuality. I did this by using language that the LGBTQ+ community had co-opted or invented, such as *homophobia*. For years I said things like, “Homosexuality is a sin, but so is homophobia.” I defined *homophobia* as a wholesale dismissal of someone’s soul, that is, of seeing some people as outside of the grace of God. But this is neither a truthful definition of sin nor a truthful definition of homophobia. A phobia is an irrational fear. It is not irrational to fear sin running rampant.

4. *Calling Reparative Therapy a “Heresy”*

In 2014 I wrote in a highly publicized article that reparative therapy “is a heresy, a modern version of the prosperity gospel. Name it. Claim it. Pray the gay away.”¹⁸ These rank among the most misguided words I have written as a Christian. I once believed that all change-allowing therapies harmed sexual strugglers by making promises that might not be delivered in this lifetime. But recent

18 Rosaria Butterfield, “You Are What—and How—you Read,” The Gospel Coalition, February 13, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>.

peer-reviewed studies have revealed that people are not harmed by change-allowing therapies even when they do not experience change in their affections.¹⁹ By failing to distinguish “hurt” from “harm” I ran roughshod with overgeneralizations. The gospel message hurts our pride in life-giving ways, and for that I praise God.

The Necessity of Repentance

Sins spin webs of confusion. Repentance breaks those webs and replaces sin with clarity. But sin does real damage. I have done real damage. And repentance means more than saying you are sorry. According to Puritan Thomas Watson in *The Doctrine of Repentance*, true repentance is distinguished from counterfeit repentance by six ingredients:

1. Recognition of sin (Luke 15:17; Acts 26:18)
2. Sorrow for sin (Pss. 38:18; 51:17; Zech. 12:10; Luke 19:8)
3. Confession of sin (Neh. 9:2; 2 Sam. 24:17; Dan. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:31)
4. Shame for sin (Ezek. 43:10; Luke 15:21)
5. Hatred for sin (Ps. 119:104; Ezek. 36:31; Rom. 7:15, 23)
6. Turning from sin (Isa. 55:7; Eph. 5:8)²⁰

Because sin is a matter of the head, heart, and hands and corrupts our thinking, feeling, and doing, repentance is known by its fruit. Some believe (falsely) that because Christ has covered our sin and taken our shame on the cross, it means that we should have no consciousness of shame. Others (falsely) believe that repentance

¹⁹ Andrè Van Mol, “Even Failed Therapy for Undesired Same-Sex Sexuality Results in No Harm,” Christian Medical and Dental Association, February 24, 2022, <https://cmda.org/>.

²⁰ Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (1668; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2012), 18.

just means saying you are sorry and then continuing on with no real change, business as usual.

The most dangerous and insidious misconception is from those who believe sin is only a matter of practice, not also internal desire. Oh, if only sin was so small an enemy as this! Theologian and pastor Mark Jones explains, “Sin is a parasite of the good; it feeds off of what God created. . . . Sin’s nature is therefore understood as an ethical problem, not a physical problem.”²¹ The false belief that sin exists as a physical problem—and that it can be domesticated or stewarded for good—is not a biblical idea. It’s hell-bound. Thomas Watson comments:

Loving of sin is worse than committing it. A good man may run into a sinful action unawares, but to love sin is desperate. . . . To love sin shows that the will is in sin, and the more of the will there is in a sin, the greater the sin. Willfulness makes it a sin not to be purged by sacrifice (Heb. 10:26).²²

Our language reveals the sins we love. The reason that loving our sin is worse than committing it is that we will commit the sins we love eventually. Repentance must go to the root—to the reckless, godless love of sin.

Confronting these five lies begins with repentance. Mine and maybe yours. Repentance gives us a clean slate, a deep fear of God, and the wisdom to go forward.

Along with repentance (which is a daily and lifelong practice), we must confront these lies with biblical truth.

21 Mark Jones, *Knowing Sin: Seeing a Neglected Doctrine through the Eyes of the Puritans* (Chicago: Moody, 2022), 41–42.

22 Watson, *Doctrine of Repentance*, 47–48.

The Necessity of Godly Confrontation

To confront something is not to reject, misrepresent, or mock it. Instead, a confrontation is an act of respect. To confront a deeply held belief involves recognizing the different points of view at play. It means knowing that there is a difference between acceptance and approval, which Pastor Ken Smith taught me decades ago and which I will address in the afterword. It requires us to take the side of the Bible's witness and to embrace Christ's point of view over and against anything and anyone that offers a different gospel. Your witness for Christ ultimately requires that you know Christ better than you know the world. (And this means that you are in the Bible more than you are on the Internet.) A confrontation finally concludes with accepting or rejecting a position—and encouraging others to do the same.

Godly confrontation does not include mocking derision.

Godly confrontation allows Christians to seek the truth, to pray to the God of truth, and to teach the truth. The truth may be hard to hear and will require many tears and much prayer. But Christians start with truth, and godly confrontation helps to reveal the truth.

Godly confrontation might seem naïve and overly simple, but that is because sin makes everything more complicated than it is. Sin creates more work for everybody. Our method for confrontation is found in 2 Corinthians 10:3–6:

Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of

God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

You might be wondering why we need to confront these lies. Wouldn't it be sufficient to leave well enough alone and build our faith on firmer foundations, leaving these lies to rot in their locations? Shouldn't we just distance ourselves from bad ideas and not take them head-on? Isn't the world just going to hell in a handbasket? If so, ought we not save ourselves and get out of Dodge?

Perhaps we could agree to disagree, turn a deaf ear to the conflict, and go about the business of our lives living peaceably (although deceptively) while we pretend that all is well when it is not? Perhaps we could argue for pluralism (where competing ideas stand side by side) or pragmatism (where practical solutions are valued over truth)? Or maybe we can take the valuable parts and reject the awful claims? Chew the meat and spit out the bones, if you will. Sometimes we wonder why we are in conflict with people who also call themselves "Christian." Can't we just focus on creating a gospel culture and not fret over the Bible, embracing the former as pure and the latter as corrupt?

The reason we can't do this is that none of these solutions honors God. Indeed, each and every one is a sin in its own right. Proclaiming the truth, living in humble obedience to the word, and professing faith in Jesus Christ is what honors God. We can't agree to disagree, and we can't split hairs because unconforted lies work a little like air pollution: we breathe it in, and we never realize that we are ingesting it until it's too late. I don't believe that the Bible calls us to hopelessness or self-preservation in the face of evil. Just for the record, I don't even believe that the world is going to hell in a handbasket. I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is King of the

whole world, and his return to judge the living and the dead will be a triumphant celebration of a King returning to his kingdom.²³ But this does not mean that our King's triumphant return comes without conflict or that some of us won't lose our lives for the cause of Christ and his gospel. The good news of the gospel sends us into the heat of battle.

Unconfronted lies have made a big mess for us. They pervade our public culture (government schools, newspapers, social media) as well as those evangelical churches that have been taken off course. If our approach to dealing with the contention of these tough times involves telling or repeating lies to keep the peace, we are contributing to the problem. Why? Because lies cannot be tamed. Lies do not coexist with truth but rather corrupt it.

Something has changed, and we all can agree on that.

The rules of the game have changed.

The landscape has changed.

And it's harder now to be a Christian in the world.

Proverbs 22:28 says, "Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set." But we look at the world and can barely find evidence that those landmarks ever existed. Sin has become grace, and grace has become sin. How did this happen and what should we do?

23 Postmillennialism teaches that the one thousand years of Revelation 20 is figurative and occurs prior to the second coming. We believe that there will be a time of immense worldwide blessing for the nations (which will be known as Christian nations) as well as a season where many people from ethnic Israel will come to Christian faith in vast numbers. It maintains that the Holy Spirit will draw millions of people to Christ through faithful gospel preaching, and Christ's return will witness a general resurrection of the just and unjust and the final judgment (Rev. 20:1–15). More information can be found in the following books: Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1984); Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Chesnee, SC: Victorious Hope, 2021); Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999).

The Years of Our Lord 2015 and 2020: The Legalization of Gay Marriage and the Codification of LGBTQ+ Civil Rights

In June 2015 the Supreme Court of the United States redefined marriage. By executive fiat, gay marriage became the law of the land. The court did not *expand* the definition of marriage to include gay couples. The court declared opposition to gay marriage a discriminatory act of “animus” (hatred). The court declared that denial of LGBTQ+ rights represents an attack on the human dignity of all people who use the letters LGBTQ+ to describe themselves.²⁴

As we will explore in Lie #1, homosexual orientation became through this seismic shift a category of personhood. In other words, after *Obergefell* and *Bostock*, LGBTQ+ describes *who* someone *is* rather than *how* someone *feels*. Freudian ideas about sexuality replaced biblical ones and became the new and preferred anthropology, the study of what makes us human. This false idea of Sigmund Freud’s has become a sacred value of American society. Freud believed that who you are is determined by your sexual desires. Freud, you may remember, also came up with a doozy of a list of other pseudoscientific stories, such as the Oedipus complex and a woman’s supposed envy of the male sexual organ.

The biblical witness of the creation ordinance provides a radically different definition of what it means to be a person than what Freud and the world offer. Under Scripture, who you are is rooted in bearing the image of God. You are male or female image bearers of a holy God with specific responsibilities and blessings accruing from God’s sexual design. But according to Freud, because your feelings are the fount of all truth, you are gay if you say so. (You are

²⁴ Dale Carpenter, “Arguing Animus in the Gay Marriage Cases,” *Washington Post*, February 10, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

also trans if you say so, or a Christian if you say so, or a dragon, or a six-year-old girl trapped in the body of a fifty-two-year-old man.)²⁵

You may not intend to invest the word *gay* with this much weight. But that doesn't make the problem go away, because the power of words is not located in our individual intentions. Once a word has become galvanized by a political cause and codified by legal force, it is no longer just a word but is now a *keyword*.²⁶ Just as a key unlocks a door, a keyword holds authority enforced by law. LGBTQ+ is an acronym, and it stands for a list of keywords. These keywords have become normalized and politicized by reinforcing their use with legal power. Take, for example, Peter Vlaming, a former Virginia high school French teacher who found himself in the crossfire of the transgender pronoun war. Vlaming refused to use transgender pronouns but graciously called students by whatever name they chose. This wasn't enough to appease the LGBTQ+ lobby. When Peter Vlaming was fired for avoiding pronoun use entirely, we see the difference between a *word* and a *keyword*.²⁷ A word can be exchanged for synonyms, but a keyword is implemented with religious exactitude. Mr. Vlaming was fired from his job not because he was incompetent but because he was noncompliant with pronoun laws. And while Mr. Vlaming's legal appeal is not finished, he is still out of a job.²⁸

25 "I've gone back to being a child': Husband and Father of Seven, 52, Leaves His Wife and Kids to Live as a Transgender Six-Year-Old Girl Named Stefunknee," *Daily Mail*, March 6, 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/>.

26 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

27 Teo Armus, "A Virginia Teacher Was Fired for Refusing to Use a Trans Student's Pronouns. Now, He's Suing His School District," *Washington Post*, October 1, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

28 "VA Supreme Court Agrees to Hear Case of Teacher Fired over Pronoun Policy," *The Roanoke Star*, March 4, 2022, <https://theroanokestar.com/>.

When the evangelical church embraced LGBTQ+ vocabulary, the true gospel was exchanged for a false one. Ironically, this made the world much less safe for people who experience homosexual desires or gender confusion than it ever was before. A genuine Christian who experiences the indwelling sin of homosexual desire or transgenderism will find both the world that says, “Do what feels good,” and a church that says, “You are a sexual minority and need a voice and platform in the church,” as equally dangerous. Where is it safe to just repent of sin and be built up in the promises of God? Where is it safe to repent and flee from your sin and *no longer be gay or trans*?

Gay Christians tell you that they must “navigate” their homosexuality. But God equips you to overcome your sin. Why did it become wise for Christians to “come out of the closet” about their sin, to tell the whole world about their sin instead of repenting of it and seeking accountability from a pastor or elders and a few close friends? “Coming out of the closet” and describing yourself by sin will never help you to repent from it, flee from it, and be delivered from it. “Coming out of the closet” is a political act of celebration, pride, and solidarity with a cause that shares no substance with Jesus Christ.

The idea that you should always “come out” and share with everyone your sinful desires happened because homosexual desire was transformed from sin (which demands repentance) to a morally neutral category of personhood (LGBTQ+), which demands affirmation and celebration.

All atheistic paradigms of personhood hate the very people they claim to love by denying them soul care. Changing the definition of personhood is ungodly and unloving. It has led to all manner of lost souls, broken families, and theological heresy, with

so-called Christian theologians declaring LGBTQ+ persons as the modern example of the biblical Gentiles.²⁹ Nothing is further from the truth. If anything, the LGBTQ+ lobby and the foolish self-proclaimed gay Christians who serve them have become more pharisaical in their practices than any other political movement in my lifetime.

And let's not forget that I was once a gay-rights activist and tenured radical professor.

This is the world that I helped create.

There is a world of difference between how you feel (recognizing and repenting from the sin of homosexual desire) and who you are (believing that you have a fixed and morally neutral homosexual orientation).

There is a world of difference between “struggling with your gender identity” and repenting of your sin.

To be sure, if you hear that someone is struggling with his gender identity, you need to stop right there and think that through. Sexual anatomy is a gift from God, and it comes with a purpose and a blessing. Because of sin, people need the redemption of Jesus Christ to experience the blessing in God's providence and calling. But even when sin clouds the reality of God's good plan, men are men and women are women, and even for those people who wish that they had a different sexual anatomy, the struggle is with the reality of physical and bodily truth. The struggle is with the sin of envy, not the God who made them.

His struggle is not with his identity. His struggle is with reality.

All this raises the question, Are people trapped in the modern invention of LGBTQ+ in need of parades, pep talks, and pronoun

29 Wesley Hill, “The Transformation of the Gentiles,” *Spiritual Friendship* (website), accessed March 18, 2022, <https://spiritualfriendship.org/>.

stickers? Or is help to be found in biblical counseling, union with Christ, and the family of God? Do they need constant affirmation for all sinful feelings and even delusions? Should they seek change for sinful patterns and practices? Is sexual orientation fixed and unchangeable? Would not Christian faith and genuine soul care by a faithful pastor and church community go a long way toward growing in maturity and facing problems, repenting of sin and growing in grace? Are people who live apart from God's creation ordinance victims in need of civil rights or sinners in need of a Savior? Do we love our neighbor enough to tell the truth?

One of the great dangers that 2015 bequeathed is the idea that "how you identify" is true. If a boy identifies as a girl, we are told that it is true. If a woman identifies as a dragon,³⁰ we are told that it is true. And if a person identifies as a Christian, well, that must be true too. We are told that to question someone's profession of faith is a violent act of trying to read her heart. But John 14:15 suggests something else. Our Lord says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." The Bible says that we can observe with our own eyes if someone is following God's law (Matt. 7:16–17).

Unity in Christ's love emerges from unity in Christ's law. The world offers false beneficence in place of real care when it fails to use God's law to apply God's love. This is especially tragic in the context of transgenderism. The world says if your daughter wants to become your son, you must comply or she will kill herself. Her therapist asks, "Would you rather have a dead daughter or a living son?" But this isn't a valid question; instead, it's a manipulating one. It's also a no-win question. It places the blame for a potential suicide in a caregiver's refusal to believe a lie. It's impossible to give

30 "Dragon Lady' Spends \$75,000 to Transform into 'Transspecies Reptilian,'" *Toronto Sun*, August 16, 2019, <https://torontosun.com/>.

a good answer to a bad question, and Christian parents are tortured by this question daily and ought not to be.

What is the Christian answer to the disingenuous question, Would you rather have a dead daughter or a living son?

It's a hard answer.

If you are experiencing the desire to be or do something that God hasn't rightfully given you, whether this is coveting your neighbor's wife or your neighbor's gender, you are to cut *that* desire off (not your own body parts). The sin of transgenderism is actually the sin of envy. Envy will eat a person from the inside out. Appeasing envy will only make everything worse. Philippians 1:21 reminds us, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Giving the flesh the sin that it wants is not a Christian response to pain. Instead, we are called to die to sin.³¹ Mark 8:34 says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

The answer to the baiting question is found in the gospel. In the gospel, we have a Savior who has paid the penalty for us. He delivers us from temptation and evil. Jesus never encourages us to sin to preserve life. That convoluted idea is a lie from Satan. When God the Father grants to us his electing love, the Spirit unites us to Christ, bringing us out of spiritual death into newness of life. The bedrock of the Christian life is this: union with Christ means we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13). Christians are beckoned first to die before we can live in Christ.

So when the atheistic therapist asks if you want a live son or a dead daughter, the answer is that all Christians want our children to be dead to sin and alive to Christ. If our child identifies as trans-

³¹ See Prov. 3:5-7; Matt. 10:37; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:23-25; 14:27-33; John 3:30; Rom. 6:1-6, 8; 12:1-2; 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 15:31; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20-21; 5:24-25; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:10; James 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:24.

gender, then, yes, the sin of envy and covetousness needs to be cut off, not the beautiful physical body that God graciously gave her.

Dying to sin and living to Christ was understood to be basic biblical wisdom until, uh, five years ago. Before the idea of “gay Christian” or “trans Christian” came into the church’s vocabulary, sensible people understood that all believers must put a sharp knife through the heart of their choice sins every day.

Owing to the fact that there is an avalanche of scriptural evidence and comfort that speaks to any believer who is battling against sinful desires, no one should take seriously the manipulating question posed by LGBTQ+ therapists. The real question is, Whom do we believe? Confused people and their secular priests, or the God of all comfort and his eternal word? Christians struggle with all manner of sin, including the sin of wanting to reject bodily integrity and our responsibility to steward ourselves according to God’s gift. No sin should shock us. We have a Savior who is mighty to save and to equip us to resist all manner of temptation. We show ourselves to be wicked barbarians if we sacrifice a true believer on the altar of LGBTQ+ and the secular psychology that defends it. If we sacrifice our children to the LGBTQ+ idol, we condemn them: “Those who make [idols] become like them; so do all who trust in them” (Ps. 115:8).

We Confront Lies with the Word of God

When it seems like we are living at ground zero of the Tower of Babel, when the whole world seems to have gone mad, we need to cling to Christ with courage, read and memorize our Bible with fervency, be active members of a faithful Bible-believing church with passion, sing psalms with joy, and pray for our enemies with humility. We need to be humble people, remembering that we were

not created to be all-knowing. We don't need to be all-knowing, because God is. Christ alone can solve the problems we face today.

God calls us to live our Christian lives with courage, tell the truth, and fear God and not man. Can we with Jesus sing Psalm 118:6: "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" I know. You can think of a long list of things the world can do to you. Your son, who calls himself Julie, won't talk to you. You will be fired from your job if you don't put a rainbow sticker on your door. Your neighbors will hate you when they learn that you believe in the God of the Bible. All of this may be true, and still this verse calls us to put things in perspective, specifically the Lord's perspective as seen in Hebrews 11, where we see firsthand that God uses our faith whether we live or die.

This is the faith story we like:

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Heb. 11:32–34)

This is the faith story that terrifies:

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy. (Heb. 11:36–38)

God records that both life and death, if done in faith, advance the gospel and give glory to God. Christians ought never despise suffering for Christ. And as we are seeing today and have seen throughout church history, all true Christians will suffer for the truth of Christ.

As we face inevitable suffering, we must pray for increased faith to endure to the end. We who believe the whole gospel must take care of each other, joining together in worship, prayer, and the practice of hospitality.

Let's turn now to the first prominent lie that our anti-Christian age embraces, the idea that homosexuality is normal. The normalization of homosexuality is the central controlling narrative of our anti-Christian age, so we must confront the question head-on.

Is it true? Is homosexuality normal?

LIE #1

HOMOSEXUALITY
IS NORMAL

Once Gay, Always Gay?

*If the LORD of hosts
had not left us a few survivors,
we should have been like Sodom,
and become like Gomorrah.*

ISAIAH 1:9

I WAS NOT RAISED IN A CHRISTIAN HOME, and when I first started attending church, I found myself bristling under the word of God. It was patriarchal (and that was bad), and I was a feminist lesbian (and that was good). The Bible was outdated and untrustworthy, and I was progressive and kind. The Bible's narrative worked from a worldview of totality and total truth, and I was a postmodernist, a person who believed stories were fragmented and arbitrary, like shattered glass. I was confident that the Bible was androcentric (man-centered), heteronormative (promoting heterosexuality, which I thought was a bad thing), and misogynist (woman-hating). And I hated everything to do with the Bible, since I was a women-centered, pacifist, lesbian vegetarian (and this was all very good and moral, in my opinion). How in the world did

I end up with faith in the Jesus Christ of the Bible? And why did faith in Jesus change my loyalty such that I had to reject feminism and homosexuality—all of it?

The church that I first attended was pastored by Ken Smith, a Reformed Presbyterian pastor who was in his mid-seventies at the time. I was in this church because I trusted him. Our friendship was two years in the making when I stepped foot in church.¹ And in a Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, there is no way to dodge the word of God. A heathen like me found no reprieve. There was never a Lord’s Day when the pastor took some time off to let the interpretive-dance group use their gifts. Nope. Nor would there ever be a transgendered art show in the foyer of the church or a sexual minority bowling league.² The word of God was surround-sound, not only in the preached word but also in song, where psalms are sung a cappella and exclusively. I learned later that something called the “regulative principle of worship” (RPW) maintained this steady consistency.³

1 I describe this in *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey into Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant, 2012).

2 One cannot say the same thing about a Midwest Presbyterian church that left the PCA in 2022. See Zachary Groff, “Trans Memorial in an Evangelical Chapel?,” *Reformation21* (website), Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, March 6, 2020, <https://www.reformation21.org/>.

3 The regulative principle of worship understands worship of God as regulated by Scripture. The Scripture proof for it is found in Deuteronomy, where we find God’s warning against idolatry and innovations from the world to worship God. The full passage reads: “You shall not worship the LORD your God [as other nations worship their pagan gods], for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it” (12:31–32). Embraced by Reformed and Presbyterian churches, the regulative principle of worship declares that whatever is not commanded in Scripture is prohibited in worship, for the purpose of guarding against idolatry. While there are differences in how this principle is practiced among different branches of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, it is generally contrasted with the normative principle of worship, which welcomes anything that is not prohibited in Scripture. The regulative principle of worship not only sets a barrier to unbiblical worship practices, but

The first time I heard Psalm 113 was when I sang it along with others in corporate worship, and this psalm became a turning point for me. It was 1999, and I was sporting a butch haircut and extra piercings in my right ear—because back in the day, left was right (straight), and right was wrong (gay). I stood in a pew in the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church awkwardly seeking a God whom I secretly hoped would accept me as I was. Floy Smith, the pastor’s wife, stood at my side. Floy, a woman who could bridge worlds, brushed me with her shoulder before we started to sing. “God is making you his beautiful trophy, my dear,” she whispered in my ear, the one with the extra piercings. Pastor Ken Smith told us to open our Psalters to Psalm 113A.

I jumped in with mouth open wide:

Praise Jehovah, praise the Lord!
 Ye his servants praise accord;
 Blessed be Jehovah’s name
 Evermore His praise proclaim;

it also sets a holy aesthetic in the church. As Pastor Barry York teaches, worship regulated by Scripture in turn regulates God’s people. How and what you worship “regulates”—controls—you. While by no means a “magic bullet,” the regulative principle of worship provides a much more useful tool to discern the seriousness of a conflict than that offered by the “theological triage” concept (Gavin Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020]). The triage method categorizes issues into three tiers. First-tier doctrines are necessary for salvation (Trinity, incarnation, bodily resurrection of Christ). Second-tier doctrines are those theological convictions necessary for the long-term health of the church (administration of the sacraments and ordination vows). Third-tier contains biblical convictions that are matters of personal conscience that do not divide fellowship. Over time, the triage method easily places all second-tier matters into third-tier. And once ordination issues become third-tier, and once women are ordained to preach the word, it becomes the reason to make gay Christianity a third-tier issue. But the regulative principle of worship gives primary attention to anything that is out of God’s order. Under the regulative principle of worship, human reason does not dictate priority for confrontation; God’s word does.

Evermore His praise proclaim.
 From the dawn to setting sun,
 Praise the Lord, the Mighty One
 O'er all nations he is high,
 Yea His glory crowns the sky!
 Yea His glory crowns the sky!
 Who is like the Lord our God?
 High in heav'n is His abode;
 Who Himself doth humble low
 Things in heav'n and earth to know.
 Things in heav'n and earth to know.
 He the lowly makes to rise,
 From the dust in which he lies.
 That exalted he may stand
 With the princes of the land
 With the princes of the land.
 He the childless woman takes
 And a joyful mother makes;
 Keeping house she finds reward.
 Praise Jehovah, praise the Lord,
 Praise Jehovah, praise the Lord.

But before I realized what was coming out of my mouth, I was implicating myself into what I believed then was abusive male domination and institutional misogyny. I had a good chuckle over this. I summarily and thoroughly rejected this whole idea.

Like many things that have caught me in mid-leap, this psalm started on what I perceived to be safe ground. A song of praise to a God who must stoop to examine his creation; he lowers himself to examine the stars, the moon, and the sun. He makes no bones

about his authority over creation, and then he makes dead bones live. He tells the mountains to stand, and they obey without back talk. He even bends low enough to build up men and women, extending love to the loveless, dignity to the depraved, and family to the refugee. But the crescendo verse brought praise to a halt for me. I choked in mid-verse:

He the childless woman takes
 And a joyful mother makes;
 Keeping house she finds reward.
 Praise Jehovah, praise the Lord,
 Praise Jehovah, praise the Lord.⁴

That psalm stuck with me like a backache all throughout the service and beyond. Its outdated embrace of patriarchy was unthinkable! I had warred against patriarchy for decades. As the daughter of a feminist, I took up my destiny with pride. Even more than my lesbian identity, my feminist identity grounded me in everything that I valued. I wasn't a man hater. I had women friends who were sexually partnered with men. In college I had boyfriends and even called myself heterosexual. And I celebrated male-female relationships that valued unity, interdependence, and service. I lamented male-female relationships that called for a woman's submission, even if voluntary. My feminist worldview/religion declared any male-female sexual relationship that rejected sameness (the idea that men and women are interchangeable) and called for a wife's submission to her husband foundational to rape culture. What God called good, I called rape.

4 *The Book of Psalms for Singing* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant, 1973), selection 113A.

The whole verse was unthinkable. “Keeping house she finds reward”? Absurd! How could anyone find reward as a homemaker, where no one can regard and celebrate her work? I even struggled to understand what this verse could mean. Would anyone aspire to work at home as a homemaker? Wasn’t that the 1950s default employed to keep women enslaved to men? Wasn’t homemaking a sign of failure? In my feminist playbook, a homemaker failed to do essential and valuable things in the world. I observed church members I respected singing this line without shame, and I shook my head. When asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” what girl answers, “Homemaker”? Apart from the people in this small church, I realized that I didn’t know any homemakers on planet earth.

After the service, I was still fuming over the verse. I jumped to the hope that it was just a bad translation or a vivid literary metaphor—one that needed some serious reining in. And so I asked the pastor’s wife. And then I asked the elders’ wives. And then I asked some other trusted women in the church.

No one in this church apologized for this verse, and no one dismissed it as an overextended metaphor.

Instead, Floy and the other women I asked told me that every word of God is good. This line was both metaphorical *and* material. It spoke of real women reflecting their relationship to Jesus by their resemblance to Jesus. It captures the covenant promise God gave to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:15–21; Isa. 54). My friends told me plainly that a mother finding reward in her home portrays God’s compassion on the solitary. These women reminded me that Scripture interprets Scripture. They told me that these verses highlighted the complementarity of husbands and wives in a harmony of obedience that pointed to the second coming

of Christ. The sense and purpose and beauty of this verse had to be read in the context of Genesis 1:26 and 3:16, they said. Floy told me that this verse did not prohibit women from having a job outside of the home, but it did mean that any outside job needed to build up and not tear down the family. I pondered this. I had colleagues at the university who lived apart from their husbands and children for six months of the year. I had one colleague whose daughters and husband lived halfway around the globe. My colleagues at the university often chose professoriate over progeny. A lectern at a research university was valued over all else.

Floy suggested that I situate Psalm 113 in the context of the creation ordinance. So with the help of faithful Christian homemakers, I started to study these passages. I read Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” I beheld the dignity of this verse, that both men and women derive their image from God. I beheld how far short my feminist worldview stood in relation to God’s word. The order of creation made the point: the sexes are equal in essence and different in social roles. Everything in my body and brain screamed, *Wrong!* Even so, a whisper in my heart craved covering by God and the covenant of church and family.

Then my sisters walked me through Genesis 3:16, God’s curse on Eve: “To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you’”(NKJV). This verse was not easy to untangle. It became more manageable when I read it next to the parallel verse: “Sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you,” God tells Cain, “but you should rule over it” (Gen. 4:7 NKJV). The literary echoes exposed how sin distorted everything—including relationships between husbands

and wives. It started to make sense that sin's entrance into the world produced a collision of wills within marriage. I wondered, Which came first? God's love followed by Adam plunging the world into sin? Or violence and male dominance followed by a Christianity that institutionalized stupidity, myopia, and misogyny? I wondered, Which story is true? The feminist one or the biblical one? Is a wife's submission to her husband part of the blessing of creation or part of the curse? Where (if anywhere, I thought) does my lesbianism fit into a biblical paradigm?

Over time, as the Holy Spirit was working on my heart and mind, I started to see the logic in God's love and God's order. And if God's love came first—because God himself has no beginning and no end—then God's law could not be some 1970s rallying cry or some 1950s cultural trap. Instead, God's law is presented as a logical and obvious interpretation of what total depravity reveals about my heart. The sin that Adam imputed to all would vex our will to do what God wants—both personally and relationally. And what does God want? He wants his firstfruits—men and women—to cherish and triumph under his creation ordinance. Even as I railed against Psalm 113, some deep part of me recognized God's word as good—truly, uniquely, separately good. God's word was real as rain to me, even as I tried to push it away. And God's word started a war in my heart that needed to be fought to completion. His word made clear that a wife's submission in the Lord to her godly husband is part of the creation order, like it or not. (And I didn't.)

What did this mean for me as a lesbian in a committed relationship?

Was I just an outsider looking in?

What does this mean for Christian women who are single?

Psalm 113 raised questions that demanded answers.

Psalm 113 did more than make me reflect on culture. It pressed me to see my lesbianism in the light of both Scripture and feminism. Lesbianism was my sexual identity and my sexual preference. (I never did call lesbianism my sexual *orientation*. I was a nineteenth-century scholar after all, and I knew that sexual orientation was embedded in Freudianism, which was not exactly feminism's friend.) Sexual orientation also seemed to lean on the idea that homosexuality was an illness that needed a cure. I believed it was an informed choice—and part of normal sexual fluidity. The late lesbian poet and essayist Adrienne Rich, in her essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” perfectly captured my understanding of why I was a lesbian—and the path that led me there.⁵

But feminism was my worldview *and* religion. I didn't just find women sexually attractive; I found the whole worldview of queer theory and feminism inspiring, meaningful, and life-giving. I believed in a world where distinctions and hierarchies of any kind must be eliminated so that the sacred and divine nature of people could be finally realized. My life as a lesbian seemed to invite me to participate in something deeper and larger than my small world and good for the future of the world. It gave me a team jersey and a position on the field. But Psalm 113 said something else entirely. If Psalm 113 was true, then I was heading in the wrong direction. Like a cancer patient weighing therapies, I feared the cure as much as the disease.

But as I sang Psalm 113, my priorities and values seemed to be wrong, wrong, wrong. Scripture whispered from the inside, and feminism shouted from the bleachers. Lesbianism reflected how I felt. But as a thinking person, I realized that lesbianism was more than a

5 Adrienne Cecile Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (London: Only-women Press, 1981).

set of feelings and desires. Can a person be a lesbian and a Christian, in desire and deed? Psalm 113 said no. Lesbianism in light of Scripture is a rejection of men in general and the creation ordinance in particular. Lesbianism rejects the creation cosmology—the nature of the universe. Calling lesbianism good and holy meant denying that God planted the seeds of the gospel in the garden. That made me think. If lesbianism in light of Scripture is a rejection of the creation ordinance, then I can't have my lesbian identity and Christ.

While meditating on this psalm, I considered how my homosexuality was tightly woven into certain feminist predispositions that, while not sinful in themselves, served me well as a lesbian. I exuded boldness and strength rather than gentleness and kindness. Christians are, of course, called to be bold and strong, but the ease with which I applied these attributes became something of a setup for me, a setup for sin and not submission. My feminist worldview valued boldness and strength and regarded gentleness and kindness as weaker virtues, reserved for only safe spaces, and dangerous in any patriarchal hierarchy. I pondered this. Again, sisters in the Lord were there at my side, reminding me that the fruit of the Spirit calls for “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). Christians sure are a mixed bag of unusual virtues, I thought.

I went back and forth like this for months, asking the same questions of both communities, my church community and my lesbian one. I respected women from both places, and I listened intently and weighed their answers.

I straddled two incommensurable worlds. They represented not just different sides of a coin, but different coins. We were not all in the same forest looking at different trees from different angles. We were in different forests altogether.

It was utterly and completely shocking to realize that my lesbianism was truly a sin. How in the world does one do battle with something that just feels like normal life? My friends from the church talked about biblical patterns of addition and subtraction, about repentance and grace.

I was starting to see that if I intended to do battle with my flesh—that is, if I intended to do battle with the sin of homosexuality—this required embracing God’s intent for me to live out all the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit, not just the ones that came easily to me. Godly womanhood started to appear not as a cookie-cutter recipe but as a particular application of God’s grace to me, with the word of truth molding the clay of my heart. I started to pray in earnest, with Bible open and pen and notebook in lap. I started to pray that God would make me a godly woman.

Sometimes this prayer would wrap me in cold fear, and I would get up from the chair and look at myself in the mirror.

My butch haircut and piercings seemed to mock every word.

I told no one about this prayer.

The women in the church continued to encourage me to search the scriptures for answers. They firmly believed that the Bible was a living book and that it knew me better than I knew myself. They reminded me that godly womanhood does not erase a woman’s strength or identity; rather, it applies God’s grace to me. The women in my church told me that God intended to make me a godly woman and that I indeed would recognize myself as he conformed the clay of my heart and life to his will.

And so it was that Psalm 113 changed my life. I looked into its mirror, and I saw how short I had fallen from God’s will. God used the offense of God’s word for the good of my soul.

The afternoon that I broke up with my lesbian partner was a dark one. Uttering words of defeat felt like walking underwater. Margaret collapsed in tears and called me every name in the book. I was pushing through a weight that I could not explain. I felt miserable before the breakup, and I felt miserable after. And so did she. After the breakup we started the painful process of dividing up a shared life—dogs, dishes, and a house on the lake. My church friends carried me through this. They didn't meddle, but they also didn't leave me to figure it out all by myself.

And then, a few years later, Psalm 113 changed my life again.

After my conversion, I noticed my affections changing. It wasn't instantaneous—like a combustion—but union with Christ was something that I could perceive growing inside me. I started to embrace my role as a single Christian woman and a member of the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church. I didn't stop cold turkey feeling like a lesbian. Not at all. But I did register lesbian desires as sinful acts in need of repentance, not morally neutral attributes of my identity or person. No one told me to pray the gay away. Because every sermon told me to drive a fresh nail into every sin every day, no one needed to. I started to commit to memory the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Question 35: What is Sanctification?

Answer: Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

Dying and living, growing in sanctification and looking to Christ, embodied the Christian life.

Instead of lesbianism being who I was, I now understood it as both a lack of righteousness and a willful transgressive action. I was no victim. I was no “sexual minority” needing a voice in the church. I needed to grow in sanctification—just like everyone else in the church. I learned that we repent of sin by hating it, killing it, turning from it. But we also “add” the virtue of God’s word. It is light that changes darkness. The Bible calls us to mortify (kill) and vivify (enliven). I realized that Christians are given a new nature, yet we have sin patterns that we need to kill, to be sure. Colossians 3:9–10 puts it like this: “You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” This passage told me that I am a Christian and that lesbianism is part of my biography, not my new nature, regardless of how I feel inside. The biography of my life as a lesbian is from the short and early chapters of my life, and there is no reason in heaven and earth for me to keep reliving and rereading those chapters. Progressive sanctification is real.

The Lord had both changed the affections of my heart and beckoned me to embrace my role as a godly woman. One afternoon while having tea and Bible study with Floy, I asked her what I should do with my life. I was thinking about this question in a comprehensive and philosophical way. Floy answered in predictable feet-on-the-floor practicality. Floy suggested that I look around for young mothers in the church who needed help and offer to make some meals, do some dishes, help with toddler story time and folding laundry. I took her advice.

My only experience with babies and small children at that time was what I learned in their homes. I had never held a baby in my arms until this time in my life. Nevertheless, I discovered that I loved helping new mothers. Mothering was a fascinating job, not

terribly unlike being a research professor: you must do one thing at a time well, and you must have flexibility and good humor as you carry on. Soon, I found myself at home in the world of holding babies and entertaining toddlers and cooking meals for families. I learned so much during that time. I learned that I loved to watch children grow—in physical and spiritual ways. It amazed me that I could perceive the Holy Spirit working in the lives of some very small children. I understood why Jesus wanted to have children around him. A child who loves God and knows that Jesus has forgiven his sins was a marvel to me. Nothing is more precious to behold. It seemed strange to me that young mothers welcomed my company. It seemed even stranger when they asked me for advice! These women in the church wanted me—*me*—to pray for them and sing psalms to their children. I had no idea until this experience that I was a nurturing person and a gentle woman. I took up my role as an older friend with a glee that surprised me. I was fascinated by how their households worked, by how much skill went into keeping a home and homeschooling children.

After I had poured out my heart to God, begging him to make me a godly woman, he gave me another desire: to be a godly wife to a godly husband and to submit to him, help him in his work, and, if God willed, to be a mother of children. A season fraught with strife and turmoil—including a failed engagement—followed,⁶ and then I met Kent Butterfield. The Lord knit our hearts together, and Kent proposed marriage.⁷ I have been married to Kent for over

⁶ I discuss this in *Secret Thoughts*.

⁷ I share this personal history with you not because I am trying to win an argument using my personal feelings and experiences. It is the word of God alone that witnesses to the truth. I dated men in college and assumed that I would one day marry a man and have a family. In graduate school, when I met my first lesbian lover, I felt like I had come home to myself. Lesbianism felt normal and natural for me. And then I met the Lord and started

two decades now, and the Lord has used Kent more than any other person on earth to show me God's love and purpose. Kent is my husband, but he is also my pastor. The Lord knows that I am a weak woman, and in his perfect plan, I have been married to my good and godly pastor for almost as long as I have been a Christian. My own life story of conversion and sanctification, of healing and transformation, merged with biblical marriage. No one had ever wanted to protect me before the Lord brought Kent into my life.

Our engagement forced many decisions. One was what to do with my professional life. I wanted to be Kent's helper, but was that what God wanted for me? Was it right or wrong to leave my profession as a tenured professor at a prestigious research institution? Would it not be a greater win for the kingdom of God to have a tenured professor in the world than to have another homemaker in church?

I stood at the mouth of three divergent paths, three opposing life directions, three mutually exclusive options. The one that I walked in would unmistakably shape me. I could return to Syracuse University as a tenured professor of English. I could stay at Geneva College and apply for a position in administrative leadership. Or

to do battle with the sin of lesbianism. I realize that some people reading my story may be quick to dismiss it, since I "only" lived as a lesbian for a decade. I'm grateful that the Lord gave me a way of escape and that I was not trapped in that sin for any longer than I was. I narrowly escaped and have the Lord and my church to thank for that. I am daily grateful that the Lord brought me to repentance. I realize that for some faithful Christians, the battle against homosexual lust is harder and longer than mine. The Lord knows how hard desires of the flesh are, and how it feels like you have a civil war going on inside of you. The apostle Paul gives us these words of comfort: "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Gal. 5:17). In other words, the battle is part of the victory. My generation of lesbian came out of the paradigm reflected by the late poet Adrienne Rich—that heterosexuality was compulsory and therefore many women's lesbian lives were erased. She made a full case for this in *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*.

I could marry Kent Butterfield and become a homemaker and a church planter's wife.

The first path was familiar.

The second path was recognizable.

The third path was unimaginable.

Immediately, well-intended people—Christian brothers and sisters—started to weigh in.

How could a smart cookie like me turn away from the university work the Lord had already prepared me to do? God called me to work, not sit at home and bake cookies, for goodness' sake! Isn't it sinful *not* to use my gifts? What about the books I would never (presumably) write? One brother asked, "Why can't you be a professor, dean, or university president, and Kent be the stay-at-home dad?" As one sister put it, "Do you really need a PhD in hermeneutics to change diapers?"

On May 19, 2001, Kent and I were married. Kent's work moved from a church plant in Virginia to secular work to a small Reformed Presbyterian church in North Carolina. Unable to bear children of our own, the Lord allowed us to adopt four, including two out of foster care at the age of seventeen that we adopted five years apart.

Yes, it was very hard to give up my professional life. Yes, I needed to unlearn habits and learn new skills to be a church planter's wife. During the early days of the church plant, my first job Lord's Day morning was to clean the restrooms at the Purcellville Community Center, where we met for worship. Saturday night at the community center was open men's basketball. This may explain something about the state of the restrooms on Lord's Day morning. I took up my lot Psalm 84:10—style: "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness."

At the time of the writing of these words, the ages of my children span sixteen to thirty-four. The older children (thirty-four and twenty-nine at the writing of this book) broke the cycle that had held them in dangerous crisis, and the younger children (nineteen and sixteen at the writing of this book) are thriving as strong Christians, covenant members of our church, hard workers in school and in their jobs. I spend my days homeschooling my children and teaching other students in my Christian homeschool co-op. I have spent joyful years with my grandson, even homeschooling him during the Covid shutdown. One afternoon at the park, pushing grandson Ben on a swing in the garden as we counted cardinals, I realized something simple: I had many things to do (like write this book), but nothing more important than taking care of my children and grandson. God has made the path straight for me. And God has also allowed me to write books and speak to a hostile culture about our powerful and gracious God. My hands and heart are full and overflowing.

Taking care of my children provides a weight, a way to balance and measure the other good things to which God calls me. My husband provides a covering and a boundary. God has blessed and imbued both my roles in caring for my husband and children such that my life has balance and momentum, borders and a shield. Far from holding me back, my role as a submitted wife to a godly husband has given me liberty and purpose.

Psalm 113 has carried me full circle. Decades ago I railed against patriarchy and the Bible, seeing submission of any kind as a recipe for abuse and belief in the integrity of this ancient book as something for dupes and idiots. Today I believe with all my heart and mind that the only safe place in the world for a woman is as a member of a Bible-believing church, protected and covered by

God through the means of faithful elders and pastors and, if God wills, under the protective care of a godly husband.

My life is open to scrutiny. One of the fair criticisms of my choosing the role of a submitted wife over and against a tenured professor is that my life commitments fortify biblical patriarchy.

Guilty as charged.

But let's be clear. I don't embrace biblical patriarchy because I think men are good. On the contrary, the sinful nature that we all inherit through Adam is lethal in the bodies and minds of all men. I embrace biblical patriarchy because men are *not* good (Jer. 17:9). Because men are not good, I am grateful to have godly men around who can defend and protect me against the roaming ravages of evil men who truly are wolves.

I learned that being owned by Christ does not mean that once you declare yourself a Christian, everything you think, feel, say, and do is magically baptized with God's approval. Our works (including our intentions, desires, and thoughts, as well as our deeds) do not merit God's justification. Second Corinthians 5:21 declares, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." For Christians, Jesus Christ became sin (took on the stain and the punishment of what we deserved) so that we could become righteous by his grace (our righteous standing before God is all because of what Christ did). I learned that justification by grace alone comes down to this: How do I know that I am a true Christian, especially in a world of faith deconstructions and deconversions (formerly known as "apostates")? How do I make my calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10)? The doctrine of sanctification does not mean that I am a passive recipient of grace. No true believer is. Sanctification is a gift of God's grace, but only when we participate in our own sanctifica-

tion are we renewed in the image of God. Our obedience, then, reflects the integrity and authenticity of our faith. Our obedience is a duty and a joy. If this is not the case, we have reason to worry about the state of our soul.

I share with you my story because I come to Christ through the lived experience of having been radically changed by his atoning blood. I have been redeemed, which means that I do not have to pay my debt of sexual sin, because Christ paid it for me. Christ became my propitiation—a sin offering that deals not only with my guilt but also with the wrath of God directed against me. I now have peace with God. As Paul says, “Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Peace with God is not a fleeting, subjective feeling but an objective reality.

If the Bible is true, how did contemporary Christianity get all turned around? I believe that the church started to import unbiblical ideas about who people are and what the world is like, and those unbiblical ideas distorted the gospel message itself.

In the 1990s, when I worked as one of the newly minted tenured radicals, the concept of intersectionality was introduced. Intersectionality moved from the ivory towers to the evangelical church, and it is playing a significant role in reshaping contemporary thinking—both in society and in the church. We are living in the tragic era when the world is leading the evangelical church—a sign of judgment and curse, and not of God’s approval and blessing.