

POSTMODERNISM'S DECONSTRUCTION OF THE CREATION MANDATES

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Abstract: *Western society continues to feel the effects of the philosophical tenets of postmodernism and its attack on basic morality and sexual ethics. Evangelicals have not been left unscathed. In light of these concerns, this paper examines postmodernism's rapid onslaught and deconstruction of the basic Genesis mandates related to sexual ethics and the order of the species as sanctioned by God in the opening two chapters of Genesis. I will conclude that due to these strong influences by postmodernist values, Western society has seen the devolution and deconstruction of five basic mandates—in a somewhat reversed order—as decreed by God. These mandates include: the distinction of the species (1:24–26), the institution of gender (1:27), marriage (2:18–24a), procreation (1:28; 2:24b), and the centrality of the family (2:24; 4:1). The result has been not only the fracturing of society and the secularization of the church in the West, but the eroding of these God-given mandates even within evangelical churches.*

Key words: *Genesis 1–2, sexual ethics, postmodernism, marriage, procreation, homosexuality, deconstruction*

I. INTRODUCTION

Author and social critic G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) once noted, “Don’t ever take down a fence until you know the reason it was put up.” In the past half century or more, and with ever increasing speed, Western society has been tearing down fences related to sexual ethics and morality in general that had remained firmly fixed for millennia. More importantly, though, these fences, at least the ones I will address in this paper, are not mere social constructs erected by well-intentioned societies. On the contrary, the fences that Western postmodern and “enlightened” society is tearing down were put in place by none other than the Creator himself. These fences, what I have labelled the *Genesis mandates*, were put into place by God in order to allow for human flourishing and for the growth and wellbeing of society in general. The warping and/or rejection of these mandates is sure to create chaos in any society in which individuals place self above the commands of God. Not surprisingly, this is exactly what has happened, and is continuing to transpire, in Western societies.

In light of this concern, in this paper I will demonstrate how these recent trends within Western culture related to sexual ethics and mores have systematically undermined, challenged, and/or obliterated the Genesis mandates, which estab-

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lished the central role of the family unit, marriage, procreation, gender, and the division of the species. I will do this by first briefly examining each of these mandates showing how they contribute to societal harmony as defined in Genesis 1 and 2. I will follow this up with a discussion on how our postmodern Western culture has deconstructed, redefined, and/or moved the proverbial goalposts for each of these mandates which has resulted in a societal trajectory/path littered with sexual and societal confusion and personal destruction.

II. A BRIEF WORD ABOUT POSTMODERNISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

Before beginning this evaluation, however, it is important for me not only to set the context for my discussion but also to define for my reader how I am using two key terms throughout this essay. First, when I speak of postmodernism, which began in the mid-twentieth century, I am addressing the foundational philosophical belief of today's society that there are no real absolutes, especially in relation to moral values. This belief often falls under the wider umbrella of the topic labelled "moral relativism." For example, proponents of postmodernist tenets tend to reappraise many of the assumptions of the not-too-distant past related to cultural norms, one of which is sexual ethics. Generally speaking, those promulgating this philosophical reordering of culture insist that postmodernist thinking is superior to that of the past and that no one person's morality or sexual ethic is to be viewed as better than the next: all of life's experiences are relative and therefore directly related to one's personal reality. Those embracing postmodern moral relativism belittle traditional values/standards by rendering them obsolete and socially restricting.

Second, I use the term deconstruction not in its literary and philosophical sense as developed and practiced by figures such as Jacques Derrida¹ and Michel Foucault² in the second half of the twentieth century, but rather as a term to denote the process by which tradition and traditional values—specifically those espoused in the text of Scripture—have been undermined and dismantled in favor of postmodernist agendas. Now to be sure, deconstructionist ideals and postmodernism do in fact include philosophical principles, but these will not be the center of my discussion. Rather, I will focus on the effects and natural outcomes that these approaches have had on Western culture, and in by extension, on evangelicals.

Finally, while I will be primarily focusing on postmodernism's deconstruction of sexual ethics in my discussion below, at the heart of this dilemma is Western society's rejection of the claims of the opening verses of Genesis 1, namely, that God is the creator and is sovereign over all things. The adoption of secular humanistic ideologies and the rejection of God's claim upon humanity has only fueled the

¹ For an overview of Derrida's perspective and for a list of his works, see Nicholas Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 188–89. See also Jason Powell, *Jacques Derrida: A Biography* (London: Continuum, 2006).

² See, e.g., the compendium of essays on Foucault's philosophy as well as a detailed bibliography of his works in Michel Foucault, *Key Concepts* (ed. Dianna Taylor; repr., London: Routledge, 2014), 189–92.

downward spiral of our sexual ethic. Yet, the supreme mandate that God is sovereign and to be feared stands at the pinnacle of all of God's laws and claims on humanity. Indeed, the first of the Ten Commandments sets this forth in clear terms not only for Israel (Exod 20:3; Deut 6:14), but for those who would choose to follow Christ (Matt 22:37–38; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). Therefore, the postmodern tendency to eliminate God from all areas of Western society in favor of the elevation of self has naturally led to the rejection of God's claims on humanity related to moral and sexual ethics in particular.

III. THE GENESIS MANDATES

Genesis 1 and 2 are some of the most disputed chapters in the entire Bible, especially from a scientific perspective and an ancient Near Eastern literary context.³ One of the other debated areas, which in ways is related to the former category, at least when dealing with the softer sciences, is that of the ethical mandates found within these chapters. In these opening chapters, God creates not only the heavens and the earth but also establishes some basic mandates for society and his creation related to morality and sexual ethics.⁴

Despite what appears to be self-evident teaching on sexual ethics, some still challenge this assertion by claiming that focusing on sexual ethics in Genesis 1 and 2 is to read these narratives too narrowly.⁵ Such a conclusion, however, seems ill-founded in light of the overall context. After all, the command to be fruitful and multiply permeates chapters 1–11 through both direct commands and through genealogical evidence.⁶ Furthermore, the numerous other references to proper mar-

³ See, e.g., the numerous perspectives as noted in the following works: Daryl Charles, *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013); J. Ligon Duncan, David W. Hall, and Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation* (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux, 2000); Ken Ham, *Six Days: The Age of the Earth and the Decline of the Church* (Green Forest, AZ: Master Books, 2013); John Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Bradley Monton, *Seeking God in Science: An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2009); Del Ratzsch, *Science and Its Limits: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective* (2nd ed., InterVarsity, 2000); John Mark Reynolds et al., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days* (2nd ed., California: RTB, 2015); John Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

⁴ Contra John F. Tuohey (“The Gender Distinctions of Primeval History and a Christian Sexual Ethic,” *HeyJ* 36 [1995]: 173–89, esp. 174, 178), who argues that Genesis 1–3 is not about moral dictums. He seeks to stress the faith-building aspect of Genesis 1–11 rather than these chapters’ instruction related to moral behavior (see p. 176). This is not only a false dichotomy, but Tuohey, like many others, misses the important role of Genesis as Torah instruction by seeing it primarily as an introduction to the history of Israel. Tuohey’s argument that the rest of Genesis presents polygamy, mixed marriages with foreigners, divorce, and other practices contrary to the Law is further proof that he has misunderstood the instructional purpose of Genesis for the Israelites. One needs only look to the dialogue between Jesus and the scribes dealing with divorce to understand the precedent-setting nature of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 for marriage and sexual activity within the marriage covenant (Matt 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12). Both Jesus and his Jewish opponents appealed to the law for this instruction. Also, many of Tuohey’s concerns have been handled at length by others. See, e.g., the work of Brian Neil Peterson, *Genesis as Torah: Reading Narrative as Legal Instruction* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).

⁵ Contra Tuohey, “Gender Distinctions,” 178, 185.

⁶ See, e.g., the discussion by Peterson, *Genesis as Torah*, 61–62.

riage and sexual issues throughout Genesis only reinforces the instructive aspects of Genesis in this regard.⁷ Finally, the belief that sexual ethics is just “one small part of human existence”⁸ is to underestimate and belittle the fundamental aspects of sexuality for the human race. To be sure, this is why we are witnessing the seismic shift and cultural war in the West. Western society is tearing itself apart due to this so-called “one small part of human existence.” It is anything but *small*: it is the basis upon which all humanity and society rests!

After the brief presentation of the creation of the universe and the earth—what is often called the creation of the “spaces” (1:1–13), which God will fill with living things—God sets forth the Genesis mandates beginning with the separation of species into kinds (*min*).⁹ Immediately following this, God establishes gender, male (*zakkar*) and female (*neqebal*), the apex of which is God’s assigning of binary gender to humans (1:27). Next, God institutes marriage (2:24) as the framework in which a couple could express their love and fulfill their physical attractions and urges, the natural outcome of which is procreation/children.¹⁰ In this regard, Genesis 2 is much more than a simple tale relating how the first couple had their beginning in the Garden. It served to teach how humans participate in the creative process and how society was to develop from the first couple. Indeed, the marriage unit from which children and descendants arose is the foundation of society. The author’s weaving of genealogies throughout the book of Genesis serves this very purpose (5:1–32; 10:1–32; 11:10–32; etc.).

By the time the reader reaches chapter 3, the close relationship between husband and wife, and in turn, between humanity and God, had already begun to deteriorate (cf. 2:25; 3:16). It is this deterioration, which first started in the Garden with the fall, which I wish to evaluate, especially as it relates to the more recent period of Western culture. Interestingly, this deterioration in Western culture, generally speaking, has gone in reverse order beginning with the undermining of the bedrock of society, namely, the family structure epitomized in the marriage unit. I believe this was intentional as the Enemy has sought to subvert, in a systematic fashion, each one of the Genesis mandates by beginning with the easiest mandate to attack: marriage. After all, God declared in the presence of the serpent that this mandate was already in trouble due to the fall (Gen 3:16).¹¹

1. *The mandate of marriage.* Marriage was meant to be a lifetime commitment between one man and one woman (Gen 2:24; Deut 22:19, 29; Jer 3:1; Hos 3:1–3; Mal

⁷ Ibid., 35–37, 76, 85–89, 128–30, 139.

⁸ Tuohey, “Gender Distinctions,” 185.

⁹ Gen 1:11, 12 (2x), 21 (2x), 24 (2x), 25 (3x); cf. 6:20 (3x); 7:14 (4x).

¹⁰ Contra Tuohey (“Gender Distinctions,” 178, 183), who, following the conclusions of Claus Westermann (*Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* [trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974], 233), not only erroneously propounds that 2:24 is not original to the text, but that marriage and the joining of man and woman is not central to the discussion of chapter 2. There is no evidence for this suggestion. Furthermore, Jesus did not see verse 24 as in some way intrusive in the thought process of Genesis 2. In fact, Jesus uses verse 24 as his basis for supporting marriage.

¹¹ On this topic, see Christine Curley and Brian Neil Peterson, “Eve’s Curse Revisited: An Increase of ‘Sorrowful Conceptions,’” *BBR* 26 (2016): 1–16.

2:10–16);¹² yet, as early as the first couple, marital struggles have existed. As just noted, this began after the fall when the seeds of conflict were sown between Adam and Eve (Gen 3:12, 16). This conflict would eventually develop into broken promises and dissolved marriages. Indeed, polygamy, divorce, and marital unfaithfulness is as old as time (Gen 4:19–23; 6:2; 16:1–4; 29–30; Deut 24:1–3).¹³ One need only look at the famous account of King David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). And the scriptural references to the dissolution of marriage by means of divorce certainly is no different.¹⁴

It is no secret that marriages in the West have suffered tremendously especially since the 1940s. While marriage and divorce rates continue to fluctuate,¹⁵ today marriage has lost much of its importance in our postmodern context. It is deceptive to assume that because the divorce rates have declined since the 1970s and 1980s that things are getting better.¹⁶ The reality is that many people simply have opted to forego marriage and cohabitate instead. In other words, people are rejecting God's mandate for marriage.

Some of the reason for the lost importance of marriage is not only a changing culture but also the introduction of no-fault divorce, which began in California in 1970: marriages are no longer seen as life-long commitments to be honored. Another contributing factor is the widely accepted postmodern belief that sex should be experienced outside of marriage: waiting until one is married to experience the pleasures of sex as mandated by God is now passé. The introduction of readily available contraceptives and abortion on demand have only fueled this disturbing trend.

These “advances in science” and shifts within culture were driving factors of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s. Under the banner of freedom and control of one's body and reproduction, and in the pursuit of pleasure, Western culture underwent a metamorphosis whereby free sex/“love” quickly became mainstream and also appeared with ever-increasing frequency and explicitness in movies, music lyrics, print media, and culture in general. In light of these cultural shifts, Leon Kass notes that “not surprisingly, the result was emancipated male predation and exploitation, as men were permitted easy conquest of women without responsibility and lasting intimacy,”¹⁷ intimacy that was supposed to be re-

¹² Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 181.

¹³ See Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics and the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 330–32.

¹⁴ Cf. Lev 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num 30:9; Deut 22:19, 29; 24:1–4; Ezra 10; Nehemiah 13; Isa 50:1; Jer 3:1; Ezek 44:22; Matt 5:32; 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18. On the rights of women to divorce in ancient Israel/Judaism, see Bernadette J. Brooten, “Konnten Frauen im alten Judentum die Scheidung betreiben?,” *Ei/T* 42 (1982): 65–80; Eduard Schweizer, “Scheidungsrecht der jüdischen Frau?,” *Ei/T* 42 (1982): 294–300; and Bernadette J. Brooten, “Zur Debatte über das Scheidungsrecht der jüdischen Frau,” *Ei/T* 43 (1983): 466–78 (as noted by Craig Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3–12,” *TrinJ* 11.2 [1990]: 165 n. 16).

¹⁵ See <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage-divorce.htm>.

¹⁶ See https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/06/23/144-years-of-marriage-and-divorce-in-the-united-states-in-one-chart/?utm_term=.4d8c6fa074d8.

¹⁷ Leon R. Kass, “Regarding Daughters and Sisters: The Rape of Dinah,” *Commentary* 93.4 (1992): 38.

served for marriage. In this new social context, not only could men now take advantage of women in a new manner, but both men and women declared themselves emancipated/“liberated” from the age-old “restrictive bonds” of purity and the need for marriage as the righteous context for enjoying God’s design for sex. Sadly, a growing number of evangelicals today hold to the belief that the “purity” culture of the church is restrictive and harmful to proper emotional and spiritual growth.¹⁸ Of course, this is a direct affront to the Genesis mandate that sex is to be experienced in the confines of marriage.¹⁹ When humanity flouts this rule, trouble is not far behind.

Now to be sure, sex for pleasure outside of the marriage covenant certainly is not new nor is it unique to Western culture; one need look no further than the excesses of the Roman Empire and many cultures both before and after. Yet, even within these pagan cultures, marriages were still the bedrock of society. Moreover, these past excesses pale in comparison to what is happening today in Western society. Laying aside the pornography epidemic,²⁰ practically every aspect of Western culture, Christian or otherwise, is being influenced by the belief that sexual promiscuity before marriage is fine.²¹ In some cases, self-professing “Christian” pastors encourage promiscuity and being unequally yoked with unbelievers as a means of demonstrating Christian “love” and “hospitality.”²² Furthermore, it has often been said that Christians practice their sexual wantonness through multiple divorces and remarriage.

By moving away from the foundational Genesis mandate of marriage and the use of sex within that framework, Western society has lost the purpose of marriage as a stabilizing factor for society in general (I will address the redefining of marriage below). Through postmodernism’s deconstruction of the purpose of sex and marriage, one of the side effects has been an increased number of illegitimate births and an increase in the killing of unwanted babies through the horrific and damnable practice of abortion. This, of course, is the deconstruction of the next key Genesis mandate.

2. *The mandate of procreation.* In the first two chapters of Genesis, God commands both humanity and animals to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (1:22, 28; cf. 6:1; 8:17; 9:1). Procreation is also implicit in the words of God to Adam and Eve in 2:24 when he declares that they will become “one flesh” (*basar ’echad*).²³ By

¹⁸ <http://www.foxnews.com/lifestyle/2018/09/15/woman-recalls-how-broke-free-evangelical-purity-movement.html>.

¹⁹ See the timely discussion of Mo Isom, *Sex, Jesus, and the Conversations the Church Forgot* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

²⁰ See the staggering statistics on Christian use of pornography in *ibid.*, 61–68.

²¹ See *ibid.*, 75–90.

²² See, e.g., the troubling position of Bromleigh McCleneghan, *Good Christian Sex: Why Chastity Isn’t the Only Option—And Other Things the Bible Says about Sex* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), 146, 150, 167, 170, 205, 209.

²³ See Brian Neil Peterson, “Does Genesis 2 Support Same-sex Marriage? An Evangelical Response,” *JETS* 60 (2017): 681–91; Russell R. Reno, *Genesis* (Brazos Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 74–76; John Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 178–79; Martin Luther, *Luther’s Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1: *Chapters 1–21* (trans. J. Theodore Mueller; Grand

citing these verses I am not suggesting that every couple will have multiple children.²⁴ Nor am I suggesting that having children will always be a product of marriage. The marriage of elderly or barren people push against this conclusion. But one must also keep in mind that barring these exceptions, children are a natural byproduct of marriage and a blessing from God (Ps 127:3), especially in Genesis (15:4; 24:60; 30:1; 33:5; 41:51–52; 48:4). It is self-evident that having children is the means by which society grows. Therefore, to kill one's children is an affront to God.

Even in the ancient Near East, abortion was problematic even though in some cases it was allowed or tolerated as evidenced in cuneiform and Egyptian texts.²⁵ More often than not, having children was viewed as a blessing from God/the gods²⁶ and therefore abortion was “probably not widely practiced.”²⁷ When it was used, one of the ways it was implemented was by exposing to the elements the unwanted child (usually females) after birth (Ezek 16:4–5). Another barbaric attack on children in the ancient world was child sacrifice, most notoriously practiced at Carthage in North Africa (750–146 BCE).²⁸ At certain periods of history abortion and child sacrifice were even used to control populations.²⁹

Despite the laxness of how the unborn baby and young children were treated in some cultures, in the Middle Assyrian Laws (1400 BCE), abortion was prohibited outright with the penalty of death by impalement if it was attempted (cf. MAL A §53).³⁰ Also, the Persian law code *Zend-Avesta* (ca. 6th–5th centuries BCE) called abortion murder, although the punishments for such an act are not clear (cf. laws 15 and 16).³¹ Even though other societies/law codes may not have viewed the un-

Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 55, 56; Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Oakland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 68–69, 71; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (OTL; rev. ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 85; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 71. And contra William F. Luck, *Divorce and Remarriage: Recovering the Biblical Law* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 16; and Tuohey, “Gender Distinctions,” 183.

²⁴ Charles E. Cerling, “Abortion and Contraception in Scripture,” *CRS 2* (1971): 47–48.

²⁵ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yabweb: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 490 and nn. 170–71. Here, Davidson notes CAD 11/1:79 and Cyril P. Bryan, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine: The Papyrus Ebers* (Chicago: Ares, 1974; repr. of *The Papyrus Ebers* [London: G. Bles, 1930]), 83. Note also the comments of Andrew E. Hill, “Abortion in the Ancient Near East,” in *Abortion: A Christian Understanding and Response* (ed. James K. Hoffmeier; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 31–48, esp. 37–38. See Cerling, “Abortion and Contraception in Scripture,” 44–45 for comments on this topic related to early Judaism.

²⁶ Deut 28:4; Josh 24:3; 1 Sam 1:19, 27; 2:20; 1 Chr 28:5; Ps 127:5; 128:3; Isa 8:18.

²⁷ Davidson, *Flame of Yabweb*, 487.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 490. See also Lawrence E. Stager and Samuel R. Wolff, “Child Sacrifice at Carthage: Religious Rite or Population Control,” *BAR 10* (1984): 31–51.

²⁹ James K. Hoffmeier, “Abortion and the Old Testament Law,” in *Abortion: A Christian Understanding and Response*, 52–53.

³⁰ Davidson, *Flame of Yabweb*, 490–91. See also G. R. Driver and John C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935), 116–17; and Hill, “Abortion in the Ancient Near East,” 40–42.

³¹ Hill, “Abortion in the Ancient Near East,” 42–44, 46.

born child as equal with a living person,³² the Middle Assyrian Laws continued to prosecute those who aborted their children with the *lex talionis* principle (MAL A §§50 and 52).³³ Despite the ambiguity related to this topic in certain ancient cultures, it is clear that abortion was in no way used at the levels witnessed in Western societies today.

What is more, in each of the cases noted above where people destroyed their children, God rejected these practices outright in the Bible.³⁴ Although some argue that there is no clear legislation on abortion found in the Bible, James Hoffmeier and others have argued persuasively that Exod 21:22–25 does in fact prohibit (implicitly) any act of abortion or forced premature birth.³⁵ Moreover, it is generally understood by scholars that abortion was not accepted by Israelite society.³⁶ And arguments from silence that attempt to support abortion from Scripture are linguistically problematic.³⁷ Of course, this does not even broach the discussion of contraception, a topic that while germane to our discussion, is beyond the scope of this paper.³⁸ What can be said on this topic is that while Israel *may* have used contraceptive devices or potions, there is no conclusive evidence that they did, especially in light of their strong desire for children (e.g. Sarah, Rachel, Tamar, Hannah, etc.).³⁹ Furthermore, the fact that children are made in the image of God betrays the value that God places upon them.⁴⁰ Finally, numerous Scriptures point to the value of the unborn child and the role that God plays in forming and shaping a baby in the womb (Job 10:8–12; Ps 139:13–16; Jer 1:4–6; Gal 1:15). Based upon these texts, the opening Genesis mandates, and in light of the clear prohibition in Exod 21:22–25,

³² E.g. Lipit Ishtar (§§d and f; c. 1934–1924 BCE); Sumerian law codes (§§1 and 2; c. 1800 BCE); Code of Hammurabi (§§209, 211, 213; c. 1760–1750 BCE); Hittite laws (§§17 and 18; c. 1650–1500 BCE).

³³ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 492–93.

³⁴ Lev 18:21; Deut 12:31; 18:10; 2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17, 31; 21:6; 23:10; Isa 57:5; Jer 6:11; 7:31–32; 9:20 (Heb); 18:21; 32:35; Ezek 16:21, 36; 20:26, 31; 23:37; Ps 106:37; 2 Chr 33:6. See Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 490 n. 168. See also, C. Hassell Bullock, “Abortion and Old Testament Prophetic and Poetic Literature,” in *Abortion: A Christian Understanding and Response* (ed. James K. Hoffmeier; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 65–71.

³⁵ Hoffmeier, “Abortion and the Old Testament Law,” 57–61. Hoffmeier engages with a number of scholars who have argued extensively for the value of the unborn child. This debate started with furor in the late 1960s on the eve of the Roe v. Wade decision. See also Meredith G. Kline, “Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus,” *JETS* 20 (1977): 193–201; Robert N. Congdon, “Exodus 21:22–25 and the Abortion Debate,” *BSac* 146.582 (1989): 132–47; Samuel E. Loewenstamm, “Exodus 21:22–25,” *VTT* 27.3 (1977): 352–60; Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 168–72.

³⁶ See Kline, “Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus,” 193, 200; Hill, “Abortion in the Ancient Near East,” 46–47. These as noted by Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 491; Cerling, “Abortion and Contraception in Scripture,” 47.

³⁷ Cerling (“Abortion and Contraception in Scripture,” 54 n. 63) notes this fact even though he believes that both the OT and NT are silent on abortion and contraceptives.

³⁸ See, e.g., the detailed work of J. T. Noonan Jr., *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965) or Cerling, “Abortion and Contraception in Scripture,” 48–53.

³⁹ Cerling, “Abortion and Contraception in Scripture,” 49–50.

⁴⁰ Hoffmeier, “Abortion and the Old Testament Law,” 53–57; Donald M. Lake, “A Theological Perspective on Abortion,” in *Abortion: A Christian Understanding and Response*, 89–91.

it seems to push the bounds of credulity when people suggest that God is fine with the killing of unborn babies.

In our modern Western context, the now-infamous *Roe v. Wade* ruling of 1973 made the right to abortion the law of the land. This decision by the highest court in the United States has sanctioned the wholesale slaughter of millions of children.⁴¹ Christians should, and many do, recoil at the thought of killing one's children. This is due in part to what appears to be the clear prohibitions of this practice taught in the Bible (e.g. Exod 21:22–25; Ps 139:16; Jer 1:5; see above discussion). Western society's celebration of "women's reproductive rights" at the expense of the unborn certainly is not what God had in mind when he instituted the Genesis mandate to procreate. And recent events in the United States related to the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court justices who hold more conservative positions on the rights of the unborn serve only to highlight the vitriol leveled against those who seek to uphold a higher standard related to the sanctity of life. Sadly, over the past 45 years since the *Roe v. Wade* decision, evangelical support for abortion has only increased, a telling reality of how the evangelical church has once again allowed postmodernist values to erode the Genesis mandates within Western culture.⁴²

While I could devote an entire book to this one topic, and many have, suffice it to say that scripturally, God was always concerned with how Israel treated the unprotected in society such as the widow, orphan, and foreigner. The Torah and the prophets deal extensively with this very topic.⁴³ From a parallel perspective, I would argue that Western society's mistreatment of the unprotected in our society, that is, children in the womb, will not go unpunished. Children martyred on the altar of convenience will not be denied justice. The devolution of the value of life made in God's image is just one more piece of evidence which betrays the corruption of Western society and its rejection of the Genesis mandate to procreate and cherish our children as gifts from God. The use of abortion, and the rejection of family building by Western society, fits well with the tenets of postmodernism.⁴⁴ Indeed, we are currently witnessing even the redefinition of what it means to be a "family."

⁴¹ See the startling statistics related to abortion in real time at <http://www.numberofabortions.com>. As of 2018, the US alone is approaching sixty-one million aborted children since 1973, whereas the global count since 1980 is over 1.5 billion.

⁴² See the changes demonstrated by the Pew Research Center results noted in the article at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/03/about-seven-in-ten-americans-oppose-overturning-roe-v-wade/> and the charts from the 1980s presented in Lyman A. Kellstedt, "Abortion and the Political Process," in *Abortion: A Christian Understanding and Response*, 211–13. In the Pew Research study, researchers found that 49% of white evangelicals support legalized abortion.

⁴³ Exod 22:20–23; Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17–21; 26:12–13; 27:19; Isa 1:17, 23; Jer 5:28; 7:6; Amos 2:6; 8:6; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5.

⁴⁴ For some of the stats, see <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/births.htm> and the NPR article <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/05/17/611898421/u-s-births-falls-to-30-year-low-sending-fertility-rate-to-a-record-low>.

3. *The mandate of family redefined.* The Bible's understanding of "family" is also central to the discussion of marriage and children.⁴⁵ The author of Genesis notes that one man and one woman are to be joined for life and from that union children should be the natural outcome.⁴⁶ The traditional family unit is something that has remained consistent throughout history perhaps with the exception of situations where the family unit has been broken due to a variety of life issues and misfortunes.⁴⁷ In this regard, the term "blended" family is now a dominant reality in the West (two divorced people marry; one divorced person marries another non-divorced person; a widow and a widower, either of which who may have children from the previous marriage, marry; etc.). Now to be sure, many times these types of marital unions are nothing more than the results of living in a fallen world and as such do not a priori mean that they are sinful. On the contrary, some have argued persuasively that Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 7 may in fact allow for remarriage after a believer has been divorced by an unbelieving spouse.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, in recognizing these unique cases of "redefined" marriages, this still does not compare with what is happening in our Western culture. Since postmodernism's challenge to the cultural norms of the past, one of the areas being attacked is what actually defines a "family" vis-à-vis different combinations of gender pairing. This attack has taken on a particularly troubling and anti-Genesis-mandate trajectory since the early 1970s.

Beginning in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from their list of disorders paving the way for these types of relationships to be classified as "normal."⁴⁹ At first, Americans were told not to worry because this

⁴⁵ See Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 152–58.

⁴⁶ I am fully aware that in some cases barrenness and miscarriages may hinder a couple's ability to have children through natural processes. From a biblical perspective, God, in certain circumstances, intervened allowing barren couples to have children (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Manoah's wife, Elizabeth, etc.).

⁴⁷ On the issues of divorce and remarriage, see, e.g., David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985); Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy," 161–96; Gordon Wenham, William Heth, and Craig Keener, *Remarriage after Divorce in Today's Church: 3 Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Andrew Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Luck, *Divorce and Remarriage: Recovering the Biblical Law* (1987).

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 301; Craig Keener and Méline Moussounga Keener, *Impossible Love* (Minneapolis: Chosen, 2016), 57; Craig Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 55, 105; Craig Keener, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65; Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (INTC 7; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 107; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (trans. James W. Leitch; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 123; F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 70; Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy," 161–96; William Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians* (AB 32; New York: Doubleday, 1976), 214; Preben Vang, *1 Corinthians* (Teach the Text Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 104; Brian Neil Peterson, "A Possible Scriptural Precedent for Paul's Teaching on Divorce (and Remarriage?) in 1 Corinthians 7:10–15," *TynBul* 69 (2018): 43–62.

⁴⁹ See discussion by Michael L. Brown, *A Queer Thing Happened to America: And What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been* (Concord, NC: Equal Time Books, 2011), 458–69 and Robert R. Reilly, *Making Gay Okay:*

change would not affect their understanding of family, after all, all that homosexuals wanted was the right to practice their form of “love” in peace. Since the 1970s, however, the LGBT movement has pushed for full acceptance *and* affirmation of their relationships by the general public. This crusade has taken on a variety of iterations, most notably in the form of a propaganda campaign to change the hearts and minds of the average Western individual. This campaign is clearly outlined in the 1989 book *After the Ball*.⁵⁰ In it, the two authors, Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, set forward eight propaganda strategies for the LGBT community to normalize same-sex lifestyles and to marginalize and stigmatize any person who disagreed with this agenda.⁵¹ For example, Kirk and Madsen’s propaganda point three states:

First, gays can use talk to muddy the moral waters, that is, to undercut the rationalizations that “justify” religious bigotry and to jam some of its psychic rewards. This entails publicizing support by moderate churches and raising serious theological objections to conservative biblical teachings. It also means exposing the inconsistency and hatred underlying antigay doctrines. Conservative churches, which pay as much lip service to Christian charity as anybody else, are rendered particularly vulnerable by their callous hypocrisy regarding AIDS sufferers. Second, gays can undermine the moral authority of homohating churches over less fervent adherents by portraying such institutions as antiquated backwaters, badly out of step with the times and with the latest findings of psychology. Against the atavistic tug of Old Time Religion one must set a mightier pull of Science and Public Opinion (the shield and sword of that accursed “secular humanism”). Such an “unholy” alliance has already worked well in America against churches, on such topics as divorce and abortion. With enough open talk about the prevalence and acceptability of homosexuality, that alliance can work for gays.⁵²

A number of evangelical scholars have documented this discussion, so I will not expound on it here.⁵³ The point to be made, however, is that the propaganda, which focused on all forms of media (e.g. television, movies, magazines, etc.), has worked well. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Western society for all intents and purposes accepted homosexuality as “normal.” This acceptance came to a head when the Supreme Court of the United States ruled to legalize same-sex marriage in 2015. Of course this was never meant to be the end of the discussion; the Enemy was certainly not satisfied with this victory. For example, despite studies showing

How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior is Changing Everything (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2014), 117–42.

⁵⁰ Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the '90s* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 161–91.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵³ See, e.g., S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016); Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); Brian Neil Peterson, *What Was the Sin of Sodom and Gomorrah: Homosexuality, Inhospitality, or Something Else?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016); James B. De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000).

the value of the traditional nuclear family for the flourishing of children, full adoption rights for same-sex couples is now the norm. Should the Lord tarry, Western culture will continue to see an undoing and undermining of the Genesis mandates related to marriage and family in other areas. This could very well be reflected in family units with more than two people, pederastic coupling, and the normalizing of incestuous relationships.⁵⁴ While some may see this as beyond the proverbial pale, the deconstruction of gender distinctions is further evidence that postmodernism's assault on the Genesis mandates is not finished yet.

4. *The mandate of gender redefined.* As I have noted already, marriage, family, and procreation—mandates of Genesis 1 and 2—have all fallen to Western society's depraved inclinations and philosophy, which has been driven by postmodernism's natural tendency to deconstruct past societal values. Yet, even earlier than these three mandates in Genesis is the distinction of male and female (1:27). God's establishment of gender was certainly more purposeful than merely to show the "diversity of the human community."⁵⁵ On the contrary, gender distinctions also displayed the importance of being fruitful and multiplying, as well as being the basis for sexual activity (1:28). One would have hoped that the very natural aspect of gender would be self-evident to all logical individuals. For millennia this has been the case. For example, in Romans 1, Paul speaks about the depraved heart that goes against nature itself by warping the use of gender for the purposes of illicit "pleasure," a point touched on above when I addressed the issue of same-sex marriage. And Moses legislated against crossing gender boundaries even in one's clothing (Deut 22:5). But even these aberrations are not the lowest depths to which Western society has sunk.

We are currently witnessing the redefining of what it means to be male and female.⁵⁶ At last count, there are anywhere from 50 to 150 different gender identifications used within Western culture.⁵⁷ No longer are the terms "male" and "female" acceptable, but now Western society is insisting that if there are no absolutes, how can gender be classified as such? After all, these are "heteronormative" labels. Terms that every parent hears when a baby is seen for the first time on an ultrasound or when a child is born—"It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!"—are now being discarded for terms such as "theybies."⁵⁸ In these cases, newborn babies are assigned gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. they, them) until such time when the child can make a "decision" on gender preference for themselves. Thus, gender is viewed as fluid and on a spectrum. Transgender, cisgender, gender nonconforming, gender fluid,

⁵⁴ E.g. a search of the "top incest movies" on the IMDb website yielded over 110 movies dating from the mid-1960s until today.

⁵⁵ Tuohey, "Gender Distinctions," 180.

⁵⁶ Brown, *Queer Thing*, 549–98. I am fully aware of the classification of androgyny/intersex and gender confusion at birth due to genetic defects. This grouping falls into a very small percentage of the population. For a detailed and informative discussion on this topic, see Megan DeFranza, *Sex: Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

⁵⁷ For a partial list, see Brown, *Queer Thing*, 592.

⁵⁸ See <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/boy-or-girl-parents-raising-theybies-let-kids-decide-n891836>. See also the discussion at <https://www.babble.com/parenting/theybies-gender-neutral-parenting>.

gender creative, intersex, and the like, are now everyday terms in Western culture. What is more, the transgender push has created so much angst among those within Western culture that entire states have been forced to take stands on legislation related to topics such as gender-neutral bathrooms. Transgender proponents are now pushing for the right to choose the changing room or bathroom of their choice, despite the practical repercussions and rights and sensibilities of others. This type of chaos is just one more step down the road on which we have been traveling as a Western society as we move away from the mandates established by God in Genesis 1 and 2.

One would think Western society could not sink any further into the abyss of societal chaos. Unfortunately this is not the case. There is at least one more of the Genesis mandates that is in the process of being undermined and trampled under the feet of the postmodern agenda. This is the blurring of the lines between animals and humans.

5. *The rejection of the species distinction of the Genesis mandates.* To even mention the topic of bestiality causes most people in the West to recoil, and rightly so. Yet, this has been an issue among societies since time immemorial. Fortunately, in most cases, societies of the past marginalized and rejected these practices.⁵⁹ For example, the biblical authors recognized this sexual deviation and through the inspiration of the Spirit legislated against it (Exod 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:15; Deut 27:21).

Now to be sure, bestiality may not be mainstream in Western society, but we are certainly on the path to belittling the clear distinctions between animals and humans. I find it telling that tattooing and reconstructive surgery now includes the practice of altering a person's physical appearance to look like that of like an animal.⁶⁰ This troubling trend not only blurs the animal-human boundaries, it also mocks the fact that humans, not animals, are made in the image of God. What is more, excessive tattooing, piercings, and the practice of cutting one's skin all, in one way or another, reflect a rejection of humanity's role as image bearer of God and Paul's instruction that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19).

Another clear example of the blurring of animal-human lines can be seen in the increased militancy of animal rights organizations (e.g. PETA, ALF, ARM etc.). Now while people are certainly responsible for taking care of God's good creation, animals included, neither of these aspects of creation are on par with the value placed upon humans who are made in God's image. The Genesis mandate of 1:27 is that humans are to have dominion over the animals. That is, we are called to care for them and to give thoughtful oversight. Again, the Bible offers insight into how God not only views animals, but also cares for them.⁶¹ However, Western culture now has started to elevate animals to the level of humans by insisting that animals have the same rights as God's highest creation: humanity.

⁵⁹ See Raymond Westbrook, "Punishment and Crimes," *ABD* 5:550.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkHJK_biLNA.

⁶¹ Deut 22:10; 25:4; Prov 12:10; 27:23; Jonah 4:11; Matt 6:26; 10:29; Luke 14:5.

I am reminded of the social media storm in 2015 when a dentist from Minnesota committed the unpardonable “sin” of shooting Cecil the Lion during an African safari.⁶² This event was so “important” to the West that it even spawned an extensive Wikipedia entry detailing the account.⁶³ Calls for this hunter’s death only highlighted the extremes to which our Western postmodern society has reached. Indeed, this revealed the reality that many place animal life above human life. Today, it has only gotten worse with regular threats of death and the shaming of hunters who post pictures of their hunting “trophies” on social media sites. Many in the West display moral outrage at the killing of an animal but turn a blind eye to the butchering of children through abortion, mindlessly hailing the advancement of Western culture in this area as evidence of the positive aspects of reproductive rights for women (see discussion above).

We have also seen an increase in the humanization of animals whereby formal funerals are offered for your favorite pet while others spend small fortunes to keep their beloved pet alive. While some may not see these types of concerns as even remotely related to the topic of bestiality, it does feed into the ever-changing and devolving nature of Western culture. To be sure, I am not arguing that sex with animals will become mainstream any time soon, but it is certainly troubling that we have lost the clear distinctions between animals and humans. This is one of the last bastions of the God-established divisions within the creation narratives. And the boundaries and “fences” of this Genesis mandate are certainly being probed by Western culture. Based upon our previous track record with the other Genesis mandates, I am not overly confident that our postmodern culture will not soon take a tack that is far from what we could even possibly imagine today. The disintegration of our sexual ethics in the West certainly does not leave me optimistic.

IV. CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the discussion above, marriage, sex, and family are gifts from God. Indeed, God is no prude. God’s first two mandates to humanity were to eat food from his creation and be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. In other words, God mandated that we eat food and have lots of sex! However, the sexual ethic, as defined by God in Genesis 1 and 2, is clear. The problem is that Western society in particular has commoditized sex and redefined every aspect of it. From an evangelical perspective, it has become common fare for many to align themselves, whether intentional or not, with these God-rejecting ideals through political and social movements. The Bible has made it clear, however, that God has established certain ethical mandates related to sexuality, gender, and species distinctions that must not be abrogated. When societies of the past have rejected even a few of these authoritative mandates, judgment was not too far behind (cf. 2 Pet 2:9–11).

⁶² See <https://theconversation.com/outrage-over-cecil-the-lion-slaying-three-years-ago-left-little-in-its-wake-99163>.

⁶³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_Cecil_the_lion.

Prior to the flood, humanity adopted a carefree attitude towards marriage by promoting polygamy and indiscriminate marriage practices and as a result, God destroyed the world (Gen 6:1–4). And Sodom and the cities of the plain allowed sexual sin to run rampant, including sins such as adultery, homosexuality, and incest (Genesis 19), and as a result suffered the consequences.⁶⁴ Even Israel was not exempt from God’s wrath when they turned from these basic mandates and committed fornication, incest, child sacrifice, and adultery, which in turn degraded their society; the prophetic corpus is replete with indictments related to these very sins.⁶⁵

So where does that leave Western society if we continue down the same path? The implications are clear. Judgment certainly cannot be too far behind in light of the fact that we have moved well beyond the depravity of ancient Israel and earlier societies. The oft-noted argument that the changing of laws and the removal of boundaries will not amount to major societal degradation—what is often touted scornfully as the slippery slope argument—simply does not hold true. Recent Western history has shown just the opposite; the slippery slope not only is true, it is more akin to a slippery cliff!

It appears that it is high time for Christians, and evangelicals in particular, to begin to teach our youth that despite what society may say, God cares about what we do in our bedrooms; God cares about our sexual purity.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, in many cases, evangelicals race not only to keep up with the cultural shifts,⁶⁷ but to embrace them and hail those adopting these seismic changes as revolutionary or cutting edge.⁶⁸ Perhaps it is time to return to the words of John and note that these self-professing “Christians” and “evangelicals” have gone out from us because they were never part of us (1 John 2:19). At the same time, for those of us ministering in a world gone awry, especially in its sexual ethics, the words of Norman Doidge in his foreword to Jordan Peterson’s bestseller, *12 Rules for Life*, may serve as a good reminder of what we are called to do as teachers of the Book; Doidge states: “God didn’t give Moses ‘The Ten Suggestions,’ he gave Commandments; and if I’m a free agent, my first reaction to a command might just be that nobody, not even God, tells me what to do, even if it’s good for me. But the story of the golden calf also reminds us that without rules we quickly become slaves to our passions—and there is nothing freeing about that.”⁶⁹ We must therefore teach boldly, that God’s com-

⁶⁴ Brian Neil Peterson, “The Sin of Sodom Revisited: Reading Genesis 19 in Light of Torah,” *JETS* 59 (2016): 17–31.

⁶⁵ E.g. Jer 32:35; Ezek 16:21, 27, 58; 20:26, 31; 22:9; 23:27, 29, 35, 37, 44, 48; 24:13.

⁶⁶ On this topic see Isom, *Sex, Jesus, and the Conversations the Church Forgot*.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., the troubling perspective of Linda Kay Klein, *Pure: Inside the Evangelical Movement that Shamed a Generation of Young Women and How I Broke Free* (New York: Touchstone, 2018); Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014); Ken Wilson, *A Letter to My Congregation* (Canton, MI: David Crumm Media, 2014); and the disturbing trend exemplified by the positions of the contributing authors in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church* (ed. Preston Sprinkle; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

⁶⁸ See the lucid and apropos discussion by Os Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016).

⁶⁹ Norman Doidge, “Foreword,” in Jordan B. Peterson’s *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House, 2018), viii.

mands, indeed, his mandates in Genesis, cannot be abrogated, for in doing so, our postmodern Western society will only become more enslaved to passions and ideologies that will certainly lead our society on the same collision course with God's justice as was experienced by those of the pre-flood era, the people of the five cities of the plain, and yes, even Israel herself. Finally, as I noted in part two above, it is vital that evangelicals reject postmodernism's removal of God from our discussions on sexual ethics. While Western society in general may lack the fear of God, this must not be the hallmark of those who declare Jesus as Lord. To be sure, the only real answer to our ailing postmodern Western society is a return to a fear of God and a respect for his holiness.