**The Hope of Glory: The Future of our Bodies, Gender, and Sexuality**

December 15, 2019

Over the past two months, we have considered God’s design for our bodies, gender and sexuality within the context of the overarching Christian story. We are beautiful (created by God), and at the same time broken (corrupted by sin). But through Christ we have been redeemed, and both Christ-centered marriage and consecrated Christian singleness bear witness to this redemption. And yet, there are many things in this fallen world that hinder us from living fully into the redemption that Christ has bought for us. Over the past few weeks we considered the Bible’s teaching about homosexuality, transgender identity, pornography, and sexual assault. But the Christian story does not end with our present struggles in this present age. The Christian story ends with the hope of glory, and we will focus our attention on this theme this morning as we bring this class to a conclusion.

As believers in Christ, what is our future hope for our bodies, gender, and sexuality, and how does this hope for eternity make a difference for us today?

1. **In the beginning, God created us with bodies and called them good. In the end, our physical bodies will be resurrected and liberated from their bondage to decay.**
	1. “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but *we ourselves*, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, *groan inwardly as* *we wait eagerly for* adoption as sons, *the redemption of our bodies*. For in this hope we were saved” (Romans 8:22-24). But we might ask: what will this long awaited redemption of our bodies look like?
	2. Paul insists that from our perspective and experience of living in a finite and fallen world, we cannot now imagine or conceptualize what our resurrection bodies will look like.
		1. “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).
	3. At the same time, Paul insists that there will be an important continuity with our present bodily existence (just as a beautiful, towering, fruitful tree grows out of a tiny, unremarkable, or even ugly seed).
		1. “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.…So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:35-44).
	4. The hope of our bodily resurrection in the *future* is based on Christ’s bodily resurrection that occurred decisively in the *past*. This is why we, along with Paul, can have such confidence *that* our bodies will be resurrected in a glorious and eternally satisfying way, despite our lack of precise knowledge about *how* our resurrected bodies will look.
		1. The resurrection of Christ, described by the New Testament authors, gives us a preview of what we will one day experience in union with Christ. Christ’s resurrected body was undeniably physical (he ate and drank with his disciples; his body still bore the scars of his crucifixion) but his body also transcended the boundaries that we normally experience (his resurrected body could pass through locked doors and would never die again). Paul reminds us that it is our resurrected Savior, “the Lord Jesus Christ, *who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body*, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).
	5. Because our bodies will one day be resurrected and transformed, it is essential that we offer our bodies to Christ as living sacrifices today (Romans 12:1-2), for he is even now preparing us for the age to come.
2. **In the beginning, God created us as gendered beings, male and female in his image. In the end, there is every indication that we will continue to bear God’s image in our redeemed and glorified masculinity and femininity.**
	1. Christ said in Matthew 22:30, “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” Some Christians (e.g. Origen [185-254]) have argued on the basis of this verse that we will no longer be male or female in the new creation.[[1]](#footnote-1) But Christ does not say that we will no longer be male or female. Christ simply says that we will not get married (more on what that means in point #3). Even in this age, just because someone is unmarried does not mean that they are neither male nor female.[[2]](#footnote-2)
	2. There are several reasons to believe that we will continue to be male or female in the new creation
		1. Christ affirmed that God “from the beginning made them male and female” (Matthew 19:4). If God’s intention from the beginning would not be carried through into the age to come, presumably Christ would have indicated this.
		2. Christ appeared as a male after his bodily resurrection, just as he did prior to it. There is no indication of any significant change in this regard.
		3. The doctrine of the bodily resurrection implies that we will retain some of our present human traits, and our maleness or femaleness is one of the most deeply rooted aspects of our present humanity.
			1. “I will openly confess the faith of the Church. The reality of a resurrection without flesh and bones, without blood and members, is unintelligible. Where there are flesh and bones, where there are blood and members, there must of necessity be diversity of sex. Where there is diversity of sex, there John is John, Mary is Mary.…Likeness to the angels is promised us, that is, the blessedness of their angelic existence without flesh and sex will be bestowed on us in our flesh and with our sex….Likeness to the angels does not imply a changing of men into angels, but their growth in immortality and glory” (Jerome, c. 398).[[3]](#footnote-3)
	3. In the new creation, our masculinity and femininity will be purified from all distortions, healed from all wounds, and liberated from all false images. We will be able to receive and enjoy our resurrected bodies as true gifts from God in every respect.
		1. “The glorification of the body…will reveal the definitive meaning of what was from the beginning to be a distinctive sign of the created person in the visible world, as well as a means for reciprocal self-communication between persons and authentic expression of truth and love by which the communion of persons is built up…in simplicity and splendor…in the ‘perfect freedom of the sons of God’” (John Paul II).[[4]](#footnote-4)
		2. Interestingly, the Bible uses both male and female imagery to describe our relationship to God. The church (now and eternally) is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 21:2). Believers (now and eternally) are sons of God (Galatians 3:26; Luke 20:36). Through Christ, both men and women can appreciate (and in one sense, even participate in) the best of what both sexes embody. The divine and human natures of Christ are neither confused nor divided, but rather united in his person; in the new humanity, male and female are neither confused with nor alienated from one another, but rather united in fellowship through Christ.
3. **In the beginning, God created us as sexual beings and blessed the sexual union of husband and wife. In the end, our sexuality will be fulfilled when we, as the bride of Christ, enjoy unbroken, face-to-face union with Christ.**
	1. Christ’s words are clear enough, though they are difficult for some of us to accept: “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matthew 22:30).[[5]](#footnote-5) In the new creation, marriage and sexual union will no longer be necessary for three primary reasons:
		1. Procreation will no longer be necessary, because death will be no more, and because the “fullness of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:25) – “a great multitude that no one could number, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9) – will have been brought into God’s eternal kingdom. The creation mandate to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28) will have been completed.
		2. We will see our Savior himself face to face. In the beginning, Adam rejoiced upon awakening from a deep sleep and seeing his wife Eve, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:23). In the end, we, the bride of Christ, shall rejoice with eternal joy when we awake from the sleep of physical death and see our true and better Adam, who has truly become and ever will be bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people…He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more…They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Revelation 21:3-4; 22:3). This will truly be the fulfillment of all our human longings for intimacy, companionship, fruitfulness, faithfulness, and joy, and it will never be taken away from us.
		3. Finally, all of our human relationships in the new creation will be richer and deeper than they are today. On the one hand, we will no longer be codependent, obsessive, and idolatrously needy of other human beings. On the other hand, we will be ever more deeply connected to all our brothers and sisters in Christ, with none of the baggage, conflicts, distrust, misunderstanding, etc. that are ultimately a result of sin. We will certainly not feel that we have “lost” anything that we have previously enjoyed in an earthly marriage. Nor will those who never married or who never had sex while on earth feel that they missed out on anything either. Every sacrifice made for Christ’s sake will be honored and amply rewarded (Luke 18:29-30; Revelation 14:4). God will make all things new, and there will be plenty of time to enjoy and explore his new creation and to plumb the depths of his infinite splendor, wisdom, and love.

**Prayer**

As we await our future hope of glory, I thought it would be appropriate to conclude this class with prayer that God’s kingdom come and his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, praying in particular for the matters that we have discussed over the course of the last eight sessions.

To launch us into prayer, I have included two prayers traditionally associated with the season of Advent (both are from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer):

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen*. (Prayer for the First Sunday in Advent)

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and as we are sorely hindered by our sins from running the race that is set before us, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. *Amen* (Prayer for the Fourth Sunday in Advent)

Let us pray in particular:

* With thanksgiving for God’s wisdom and care in creating our bodies, in fashioning us male and female in his image, and for giving us sexual longings that ultimately reveal our need and desire for the Lord himself
* For husbands and wives in the church: that Christian marriages would be faithful, fruitful, exclusive, enduring, and full of joy and wonder, energized by Christ’s love and his Spirit’s power. That non-believers would see Christ through Christian marriages. That struggling marriages would be re-energized through the practice of ongoing repentance and forgiveness.
* For single people in the church: that they would flourish in friendship and household communities, in prayer and godliness, that they would receive their singleness as an honorable calling to devoted service in God’s kingdom, that they would resist pressures to live selfishly or immorally. That Christian single people would bear witness to Christ’s sufficiency among non-believers.
* For people in the church who experience same sex attraction or gender dysphoria: that they would seek and find their identity in Christ and live according to God’s creational design. That in surrendering their weakness to Christ, they would experience his power for ministry to others. That they would find wise and loving Christian brothers and sisters committed to walking alongside them.
* For the LGBT+ community outside the church: for the church to have courage, wisdom, love, and endurance in extending hospitality and in walking in holiness. That LGBTQIA people would come to know Christ as Savior and Lord and surrender their entire selves to him.
* For those affected by the sin of pornography: that those who are hiding their sin would be exposed and led to repentance. For those who are struggling, that they would have strength not only to resist temptations but to actively pursue Christ in new and deeper ways. For children, women, and men who are involved in the production of pornography to be rescued from its deception and corruption
* For those affected by sexual assault and abuse: for perpetrators to be held to account, led to repentance, and prevented from harming others. For victims to engage with anger and grief, to draw near to Christ as their merciful and faithful high priest, to find significant healing and sustaining hope. For the church to care well for survivors of abuse and be faithful to prevent further sexual misconduct.
* For all of us, that we may look forward to Christ’s return with patient anticipation and hopeful endurance

We will conclude with another traditional prayer, that Christ may dwell in us and we in him:

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*. (Prayer for the Second Sunday after Christmas)

1. This argument assumes that angels are neither male nor female, presumably because they do not have physical bodies and because they do not marry. However, angels are consistently portrayed as male figures throughout the Bible; it is not clear that they are genderless by definition. Origen is almost certainly reflecting various non-biblical influences here. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John Paul II wrote, “Marriage and procreation do not definitively determine the original and fundamental meaning of being a body, nor of being, as a body, male or female. Marriage and procreation only give concrete reality to that meaning in the dimensions of history” (*Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* [Boston: Pauline, 2006], 399). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jerome, *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem* 31, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2-06, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vi.viii.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline, 2006), 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Some have suggested that Jesus is only saying that no *new* marriages will be contracted in heaven. But this suggestion seems inconsistent with the example in the question posed to Jesus, regarding seven brothers who all had the same wife on earth. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)