

FIRST PERSON: Coming alongside Southern Baptist churches

*By Brent Leatherwood
Correspondent*



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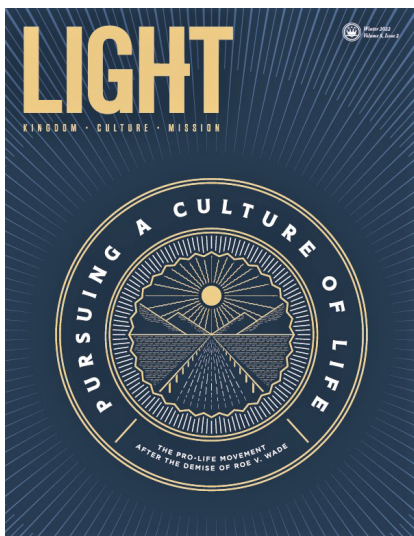
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Our goal is to help you think biblically about the cultural issues of our time by providing resources that are rooted in the Gospel. Our commitment to assisting Southern Baptist churches is rooted in the unwavering truth of God's Word and his gracious gospel.

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I encourage you to explore our website and take advantage of these valuable resources. Thank you for allowing us to serve your church and represent your interests on Capitol Hill, before the courts, and in culture. Here are some items that I think you will find particularly helpful:

– **Light Magazine.** Our in-house magazine provides in-depth articles, interviews, and thought-provoking content on a range of topics relevant to Southern Baptist churches. I encourage you to explore our past issues where you can access content on pursuing a culture of life, human dignity around the world, and

being salt and light in the public square.



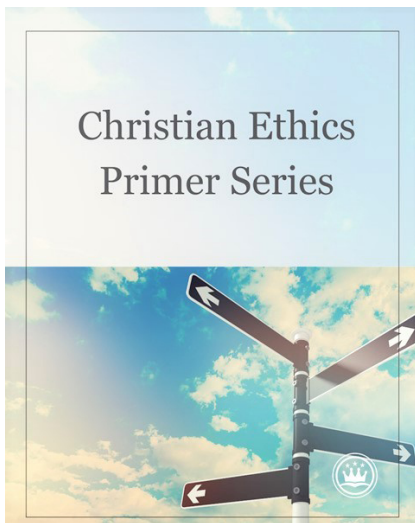
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Our team continually produces insightful content and analysis in these areas, enabling you to stay informed and engaged. Visit our website to explore the extensive resources available in these policy areas: Religious Liberty, Life, Human Dignity, and Marriage and Family.

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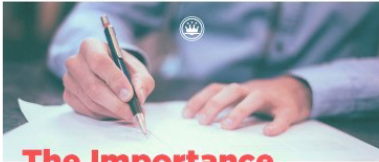
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– **Digital Downloads.** Over the years, we have compiled a library of digital downloads that cover a wide range of subjects, from guidance regarding religious liberty to cultural engagement strategies. These resources are readily accessible on erlc.com, allowing you to equip yourself and your church community with relevant information and practical tools.



The Importance of Bylaws

The ERLC worked with Alliance Defending Freedom to create a resource guide for churches to update their bylaws in light of challenges related to sexual orientation and gender identity lawsuits. Below are the five areas where churches can provide clear parameters outlining their faith and religious convictions to protect themselves so that they can continue to minister to the faithful in God's Word and bring about gospel transformation. You can read the entire guide [here](#). It is our hope that at both the theological and practical level this resource will be helpful to you as you serve your congregation.

Statement of Faith (p. 9)

The Statement of Faith should serve as an encapsulation of the foundational theology of the church or organization. In addition to the usual topics of salvation, doctrine of sin, or church polity, a statement of faith should include the position of the church related to matters of gender, sexuality, and marriage. Because these issues now regularly confront churches, it is imperative that churches and religious organizations clearly put forth their belief in marriage's foundational role in society, that it is rightly restricted only to one man and one woman, and that gender identity flows from and is inextricably connected to biological sex.

Religious Employment Criteria (p. 12)

Churches and religious organizations should strongly consider creating a religious employment requirement for all employees so as to avail themselves of the full weight of First Amendment jurisprudence. Under the "ministerial exception" churches and religious institutions are able to take religious belief into consideration when hiring and firing without penalty under anti-discrimination laws. By clearly defining roles according to their contribution to the organization's religious mission, and having employees sign the statement of faith, they can protect themselves from legal challenges.

— The Importance of Bylaws · The ERLC worked with Alliance Defending Freedom to cr

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Included are the five areas where churches can provide clear frameworks outlining their faith and religious convictions to protect themselves so that they can continue in ministry that is faithful to God's Word and brings about Gospel transformation. Download your copy [here](#).

– **A Theological Framework of Sex and Gender.** We live in an age experiencing the disastrous effects of the sexual revolution. Confusion over basic concepts such as man, woman, and marriage

are but the latest divergence between a culture committed to radical individual autonomy and a church committed to Scripture's teaching.

Local congregations daily face questions of gender dysphoria, same-sex marriage, and other issues that challenge our understanding of God's design for humanity. This document provides a theological framework for addressing these questions in light of Scripture's clear teachings with resources like these and future projects.

A Theological Framework of Sex and Gender

We live in an age experiencing the disastrous effects of the sexual revolution. Confusion over basic concepts such as man, woman, and marriage are but the latest divergence between a culture committed to radical individual autonomy and a church committed to Scripture's teaching. Local congregations daily face questions of gender dysphoria, same-sex unions, and on basic concepts of what it means to be a man or woman. The ERLC seeks to equip pastors and ministry leaders to answer these questions in light of Scripture's clear teachings with resources like these and future projects.

God created you.
At its most basic level, the fact that we are created by God means that we are limited by the design that God has given us (Gen. 1). Recognizing that we are created by God means accepting that we do not have absolute control over our bodies and how they are to be used (1 Cor. 6:12-20). They are to be used in accordance with God's design and purpose. When we attempt to usurp God's design, we repeat the sin of Adam and Eve who desired to be more like God but rather to become God (Gen. 3:5). Remembering that we are created and therefore finite grounds our theology of the body and gender (1 Pet. 1:24).

God created you with a body.
Contrary to popular understanding, our bodies are inseparable from who we are. We are not souls trapped in a body (1 Cor. 6:12-20). The Christian church has long understood and upheld the worth of the body, looking at both the creation account of Genesis where God declares the world good and the Incarnation of Christ where a perfect and holy God took on flesh and blood (John 1). As Christians, we must not fall for the lie of culture that our bodies are to be changed to meet our self-perception (2 Cor. 10:5).

God created humans male and female.
In the opening pages of Genesis, the author tells us that humanity was created in God's image and created male and female (Gen. 1:26-27). We often focus on the former, but the latter declaration is just as important. The author's description is an acknowledgment of distinction and difference between the two. Men are not women, and women are not men. Yet, we should not overlook these differences in an unbiblical way because, as the next chapter reminds us, there is nothing more like man than woman (Gen. 2:23). Still, these differences are there and part of God's design. Neither is more important or carries more of the image of God, and both are necessary to fulfill the command given to steward creation and multiply. As Christians, we recognize the ways that God has designed both men and women as distinct, yet equal expressions of humanity.



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