

Baptist sexuality conference program released

by [Bob Allen](#)

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ATLANTA (ABP) – Scholar and author Jenell Paris headlines A [Baptist] Conference on Sexuality and Covenant program scheduled April 19-21 at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga.

[Paris](#), professor of cultural anthropology at Messiah College and author of [*The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex is Too Important to Determine Who We Are*](#), is presenter for the opening session of the gathering co-sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Mercer University.

A conference [program](#)

posted recently on the CBF website includes presenters with various perspectives about how Christians should best respond to contemporary cultural challenges like acceptance of homosexuality and premarital sex.

“In recommending and inviting presenters, the planning team looked for persons who had genuinely struggled with questions and matters of sexuality and covenant first,” said Rick Bennett, director of missional congregations at the CBF resource center in Atlanta, “people who had wrestled with the hard questions.”

Plenary session topics explore how current realities and research challenge traditional categories of sexual ethics, how various Christians understand what the Bible says about sex and the role and limits of “covenant” as the moral norm for sexual expression.

The idea for the conference grew out of a workshop at the 2010 CBF General Assembly titled “A Family Conversation about Same-Sex Orientation.” Due to high interest, CBF leaders decided it was time for a larger conversation. A decision was also made to expand the focus

beyond homosexuality into the broader question of Christian sexuality.

Planners hope the event will provide a model for churches seeking to discuss thorny issues about which Christians disagree. Organizers say the purpose of the conference is dialogue, and no statements will be issued regarding CBF policy or social issues like gay marriage.

“We were especially drawn to people who were as comfortable praying the questions as they were making statements,” Bennett said, noting that each plenary title is in the form of a question. “We sought people who took Scripture seriously, people as serious about getting something heard as getting something said, and people who would enter into covenant with us respecting the aim and purpose of the event.”

Another program personality is Dove Award-winning Christian musician [Jennifer Knapp](#), who stunned many of her fans in a 2010 *Christianity Today* [interview](#) confirming rumors that she is gay.

Knapp, who took a seven-year hiatus from performing prior to release of her 2010 album *Letting Go*, is scheduled to perform a concert at 9 p.m., Friday, April 20.

Updates about the conference are being released via Twitter and [Facebook](#).