

Biblical Sexual Ethics in Light of God’s Institution of Marriage

by

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Definition of Marriage:

Marriage is the exclusive God ordained institution between one man (husband) and one woman (wife) in a mutually consented “one-flesh” relationship, consisting of mutually supportive companionship and physical union (Gen 1:27; 2:24; 1 Cor 7:1-6; Rom 1:26-27). As such marriage is a life-long, monogamous, heterosexual, covenant relationship between the man and the woman, publicly entered into before God as witness and enforcer (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:16; Matt 19:6) and is also recognized by God’s institution of human government (Deut 22:13-17; Gen 29:25-26; Rom 13:1; Matt 22:21). The marriage covenant is authoritatively based on divine law and normally recognized by civil law.

The marital covenant with God as witness and enforcer involves certain obligatory responsibilities on the side of both husband and wife: (1) marital love including conjugal relations (Gen 2:23-24), (2) living together as a single household (Gen 2:24), (3) faithfulness to the marriage bed (Ex 20:14), (4) provision for the wife by the husband (Gen 30:30; Deut 22:13-29), (5) submission to the husband by the wife (Gen 3:16), (6) and the proper raising of any children born to the union (Ezra 9-10; Mal 2; Eph 5-6). Thus, marriage is not a matter of mere social convention, but rather is a sacred bond between one man and one woman, defined by God alone, instituted by God and entered into before God.

Biblical Theology of Sexual Ethics:

Sexual relations do not alone constitute a genuine marriage (John 4:17-18) due to the fact that sexual activity and relations outside the marriage bond as defined above are always considered to be sinful (Hebrews 13:4; Matt 9:9).

It is absolutely necessary in a militantly pagan culture to submit our sexual practice as believers to the Lordship of Christ which will result in God’s glory and our good. Natural sexual desire is a gift of God and is to be placed in the service of God exclusively through marriage. God affirms the beauty of the one-flesh relationship exclusively within the confines of God-ordained marriage (Gen 2:24-26; Song of Solomon; Prov 5:15-19; Heb 13:4; 1 Cor 7:1-6). The initial purpose for the one-flesh relationship is procreational as the natural result of sexual union and fulfilling the dominion mandate (Gen 1:28; cf. Gen 9:1). The second purpose of the one-flesh relationship is relational (Gen 2:18, 21-23), thereby alleviating man’s aloneness. The third

purpose of the one-flesh relationship is social. Unrestrained sexual license greatly contributes to an undisciplined and disorderly society producing family breakdown, divorce, illegitimacy, disease, the welfare state, abuse, criminal behavior, bitterness, and slavery to sin (Matt 5:8; 5:28; Job 31:1; Ps 119:9; Gen 2:25; cf. Ps 51:10; Rom 1:18-32). Without accepted norms based on biblical prescription there will not be sufficient public restraint to control acts of sexual impropriety and immodesty in society (Ezek 16:36; 23:18; Rom 13:1-6). The final purpose of the one-flesh relationship in monogamous, heterosexual marriage is recreational. Sexual pleasure is God's gracious gift for his image bearers to be enjoyed exclusively in marriage without fear, shame, or guilt as the ultimate expression of marital love (Song of Solomon; Prov 5:15-19; Heb 13:4; 1 Cor 7).

All other forms of sexual activity outside of monogamous, heterosexual marriage are forbidden in Scripture, including fornication ("any sexual activity outside of marriage" 1 Cor 7:2; 1 Thess 4:3), adultery ("with someone other than one's own spouse" Ex 20:14; Matt 5:28), palimony ("remarriage to a formerly divorced spouse after an intervening marriage" Deut 24:1-4), homosexuality ("any same-sex sexual activity" Gen 19:5-7; Lev 18:22; Rom 1:27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; Jude 7), incest ("sexual activity with family members or relatives" Lev 20:11-21; 1 Cor 5:1), obscenity (Eph 5:3-4), pornography (Matt 5:28; Mark 7:21-22; Gal 5:26; 1 Thess 4:5; Rev 18:9), prostitution (Prov 5:1-23; 7:4-27; 1 Cor 6:18), transvestitism (Deut 22:5; 1 Cor 11), criminal sexual behavior (rape, molestation, pedophilia, bestiality, necrophilia, pederasty, etc. Rom 13:1-6; Lev 18-22), and impurity ("moral filth in one's heart and thoughts" (James 1:21; Rev 22:11; Rom 1:24; 2 Pet 2:10).

Sexual activity is not to be worshiped or idolized as is so commonly done in modern society. All people, including Christians in particular, are obligated by their creaturely existence to enjoy God's gracious gifts while gratefully acknowledging the Creator's purposes and parameters for those gifts, particularly the gift of sexuality (Rom 1:18-32). All sexual sin is ultimately a violation of the covenantal relationship God has established with the first man and woman as representatives of the human race to whom God directly gave the gift of human sexuality within the exclusive confines of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Those who violate God's design for sexual activity and marriage do so at their own peril and ultimately dehumanize and degrade a person into sinful bondage and sexual slavery (Job 36:14).

Biblical View of Homosexuality:

Homosexuality consists of both same-sex erotic attraction and sexual activity. A homosexual is one who nurtures an *on-going* erotic, romantic desire for a person of the same gender culminating in sexual involvement. Homosexuality is the result of a gradual sinful cultivation and conditioning *vis-à-vis* a natural, biological orientation. Homosexuality is not a civil right protected in the US Constitution. This equates a desired act with a constitutional right and

assumes that homosexuality is an inherent part of one's biological nature. Such reasoning would eventually be used to justify other unlawful desires such as pedophilia, incest, polygamy, bestiality, necrophilia or molestation.

Homosexuality is a clear violation of the created order of God. It violates the heterosexual nature of marriage between one man and one woman (Gen 2:24), the complementarian nature of marriage where the woman is the exclusively suitable answer to man's aloneness in marital love and physical union (Gen 2:18-20; 3:16-19; Eph 5:22-33; 1 Pet 3:1-7), and homosexuality violates the fulfillment of the dominion mandate necessitating procreation (Gen 1:28).

The first instance of homosexual behavior in the Bible is answered by severe judgment (Gen 19:4-11). The term "know" in this context clearly refers to sexual activity between members of the same sex (Gen 19:5, 8; cf. Gen 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16; 38:26). Jude 6-8 and 2 Peter 2:4-10 clarify that the cities were characterized by unnatural sexual desires. Judges 19:22-25 parallels the situation in Sodom where the men are aggressively seeking same-sex involvement. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 label homosexual behavior as an abomination along with other sexual sins. These sins violate the created order, the holy attributes of God's nature and character, and are repeatedly mentioned again in the NT as sinful, abominable, and contrary to the will of God. Homosexuality particularly was a constant threat to the holiness of Israel from the surrounding Canaanite nations (Gen 9:20-27; Deut 23:17-18; Judges 19:22-25; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 2 Kings 22:46; 23:7; Ezek 16:50; 18:12; 33:26).

Homosexuality is repeatedly condemned by God in the NT. Romans 1:26-32 condemns the practice of homosexuality by men or women and furthers condemns the condoning of such sinful activity (vv. 31-32). 1 Corinthians 6:9 condemns both partners in the homosexual encounter. "Effeminate" (μαλακοι) and "homosexuals" (αρσενοικοιτοι) refer to the passive and active sides of the homosexual relationship respectively. The "effeminate" are those who willingly allow themselves to be sodomized; whereas the "homosexuals" are those who actively engage in sodomizing the effeminate. 1 Timothy 1:10 mentions the violation of the seventh commandment to include both "immoral men and homosexuals," citing the same Greek term used in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and the Greek translation (LXX) of the Hebrew term in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Finally, 2 Peter 2:6 and Judges 7 reference the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah for indulging in gross immorality and going after strange flesh---that is men with men.

God's Will for Sinners:

It is the clear will of God for all human beings made in the image of God to abstain from immorality. This is especially true for professing believers in Christ (1 Thess 4:1-8). Not only are His image-bearers not to participate in immorality, they are not to with seared consciences give approval of immoral behavior (Rom 1:31-32). Those who practice these sins and give approval of such will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Eph 5:3-5; cf. Gal 5 and 1 Cor 6).

Thankfully, God in His grace offers His gospel to all sinners. All human beings are sinners (Romans 3:23). He promises to wash, sanctify, and justify any sinner who comes to Him with repentant faith in the Person and Cross-work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Though sexual sin carries severe consequences in this life and eternal judgment in the life to come, all sin, including sexual sin, can be forgiven *via* the grace of God available on account of Christ's infinite atonement for sin applied to those who repent of their sin and place their unreserved trust in Jesus Christ alone for their eternal salvation (1 Cor 6:9-11; Acts 17:30; 1 John 1:9; Romans 6:1-7). On account of human depravity, it is possible for any man to commit any sin at any time. Therefore, we must humbly take every opportunity to help others by introducing them to Jesus Christ, the only Savior of man from sin. In addition, we must help any professing Christian who is battling with sexual sin. We do so by accurately calling sin what it is and second by encouraging genuine repentance in order to restore fellowship with Christ and the joy of one's salvation (Ps 51). Christ did not die to save us from an orientation; He died to save us from our sin. Jesus Christ is love incarnate (1 John 4:8) and therefore by "reason of his much love" sacrificed his life on the cross in order to save us, regenerate us, justify us, and sanctify us. In this way we bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:1-6).