

Gay Marriage: Biblical Perspectives

(transcripts from Bill Loader's ppt presentation)

Acknowledging the Negative

- Biblical writers assumed human beings were only male or female people; sex was between male and female and belonged in marriage; anything else was deliberate perversion
- Biblical writers assumed the world was flat; many, that the world would soon end, that demons caused sickness, that women should not exercise leadership, and that slaves should stay slaves

Acknowledging the Distance

- We affirm that GLBT people *do* exist, unlike them
- We don't need like fundamentalists to read affirmation of GLBT reality back into biblical texts to bridge that distance or to try to explain away biblical disapproval of same-sex relations
- So we are left on our own to make decisions about what marriage might mean for GLBT people – but biblical perspectives can help

Biblical Perspectives

- All human beings are to be valued and loved, whatever their race, gender, religion, culture, sexual orientation – a core value derived from God's love embodied in Christ and affirmed as the fruit of the Spirit
- There can be no room for discrimination. Our application of biblical resources to our own day needs always to be tested by this. Discrimination against GLBT people fails this biblical test
- There can be no ground for excluding GLBT people from the normal forms of human life, including responsible expression of their sexuality but also marriage
- Appropriating biblical perspectives on marriage entails critical engagement because of changes in contraception, in understanding of what sexual intercourse does, and in marriage's socio-economic role

Marriage then: arranged male-female life-long partnership of unequals (male-female) within extended families for licit sexual union for producing and nurturing children for managing and sustaining a household of work as a basis for present and future security	Marriage now: contracted male-female (life-?) long partnership (usually) of equals in love of unrestricted origin (usually) for producing and nurturing children for co-operative companionship
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There is no obvious reason why GLBT people should not also have such contracts legally recognised and church-blessed if that is what they want

Other Issues of Sex and Marriage

Marriage as Alliance

Political alliances through marriage

Social alliances

- To form a household within the extended family
- To ensure family land and resources - essential for security/welfare
- To ensure offspring for family/household
- To ensure working partnership - domestic management

Marriages were arranged: 30 yr old with 15-20 yr old woman

Virginity mattered (pregnancy)

Adultery forbidden as threat

Same-Sex

- In the Greco-Roman world sexual responses range from sex with women to sex with other men or boys – no categories “heterosexual x homosexual”
- There was some belief that some men might naturally have a sexual orientation to males – the myth of Aristophanes; but nothing like our modern understanding of “homosexual”
- Most references to same-sex intercourse are about men who also engage in sex illicitly with women
- Many are about sex with boys in puberty – classical aristocratic Greece could include sexual intimacy in educational mentoring, later pederasty with boys or slave boys or male prostitutes

Greco-Roman objections to male-male sexual intercourse:

- One man was passive and so acted as a female – a matter of shame to act as female and to make someone do so (“it doesn’t matter if they are inferior anyway” – so Roman law only against it with citizens: slaves, prostitutes, and foreigners are OK)
- It threatens to undermine nature’s (sole?) purpose for sex: having children, so is unnatural. Population might die out. Semen might run out (also why v. masturbation and not too much sex of any kind) men might lose their vigour
- It happens where sexual desire is excessive and out of control – moderation is the model – all passion is “dangerous”, even in marriage
- It was exploitative of the young

Jewish objections:

- Leviticus 18:22; 20:13
- assumptions based on Genesis about male and female

Love and Marriage

Creation – Genesis 1

- God created male and female
- Jews assumed all people were heterosexual
- “be fruitful and multiply” –sex for having babies, but more ...

Creation – Genesis 2

- Sex for intimacy/companionship: myth of making female from male for intimacy, “that they might be one” – including sexual intimacy – something positive, belonging in marriage reflecting household values

- Jesus affirms creation: male and female and two becoming one flesh (including sexual union as positive – and no mention here of having children as the only legitimate basis for sex)

Sex and Danger

- I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman (woman/wife; i.e. some other man's wife) with lust (desire/covet/wanting to have her) has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:28)
- Not: whoever looks at any woman and has a sexual response – which would make sexual response evil and make women dangerous and therefore needing to be controlled – though it came to be understood that way later
- Male-focused: men need to take responsibility for what they do with their sexual responses (and not blame women) – also OK to welcome women among disciples
- “Pluck it out ... cut it off!” (Matt 5:29) Take sexual wrongdoing and response seriously!

Love and Passion

Herod as a victim of excessive passion

- Some among Greek philosophers taught suppression of passion, including sexual passion. Sex only for procreation.
- Avoid uncontrollability of strong passion of any kind.
- Biblical affirmation of sexual desire as part of creation but taking responsibility

The Magic of Sex and Purity

“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Gen 2:24)

- Sexual union makes a permanent bond.
- Similarly Paul says becoming one flesh with a prostitute breaks existing bonds.
- No return of a woman who has slept with another man (including after divorce and marriage)

Sex and Slaves

Male head and husband marries when ready to establish own household around 30 (time Jesus chose not to) to his wife in teens

Controls all in household

Greco-Roman world:

- sexual access to all women and men he controls
- sex with slaves, female and male; except incest
- and beyond the household: with prostitutes
- sexual experience with prostitutes from puberty onwards

Jewish world:

- sexual access to all women he controls – sex with female slaves – prostitutes came to be forbidden

Christians?

Household Head: Sexual Limits

Male head and husband – limits

- No sex nor marriage with close family members: sister, step sister, mother, father's other wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law (John the Baptist criticised Antipas for marrying divorced wife of step brother), aunt – but OK with niece, cousin – Jewish law. Greco-Roman law also had limits on incest
- No sex with women under control of another male – his wife (adultery), slave, etc. Adultery is an act of theft against another male. (You shall not covet neighbour's wife, ox, etc). Only with independent women (prostitutes) or non-citizens in Greco-Roman world.

Divorce

Male head and husband

- Negotiates and decides marriage
- Controls daughters
- Divorces

in Jewish world – only the man, though women could initiate divorce

In Greco-Roman world: both could, but normally the man

- Divorce becomes more of a problem once Greco-Roman influence and economics bring Jews to abandon polygyny; in polygyny: dissatisfied with one wife; take another!
- Jesus prohibited divorce – rationale: permanent join, but probably assumed adultery permanently severed, as Paul, and so adultery required divorce.

Male Female Sex Roles

- A superior “used” an inferior for sex (“use” = sexual intercourse)
- Male is active – female is passive
- Male is on top – women are underneath

“Women are not as interested in sex as men” (Philo)

Some Useful Literature

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See now also [“Understanding the Gay Marriage Debate”](#) and [Same-Sex Relationships: A First Century Perspective](#)