

“As It Was in the Beginning...?”

WEMTC

Marriage & Intimate Relationships II

Saturday 23rd January 2010

Can the Bible help us?

2 Timothy 3:16

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"

Aims and Overview

- Not only biblical input – look at other texts (eg divorce, homosexuality) later
- Can't be comprehensive or go into exegetical depth
- Illustrate the breadth and depth and various forms of Scriptural teaching
- Show ways in which in preaching and teaching we can explain what the Bible says in these areas.

Importance of Scripture

- Scripture as God's Word – means used in his mission of self-communication and transformation of world
- Primary goal – Lead us to Christ so that we might follow him and be conformed to him
- “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps 119:105)

Importance – 2 Tim 3:16

Four tasks for which God uses Scripture:

- Teaching
- Rebuking
- Correcting
- Training in righteousness

Goal: Equip us for every good work

But...can the Bible help us today?

- Scripture not speak of 'sexuality' in way we do today – experience and expression of sexual feelings
- Scripture speaks often of 'marriage' but pattern of marriage different in many ways
- Our world – including our sexual world and world of intimate relationships very different from Scripture
- Questions we have are not always easy to find answers to in the Bible

How does Scripture help?

- Could appeal to specific texts
- For example –
- "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor 6.18)
- 'If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death' (Lev 20.13).

But...

- What about when the Bible is silent on our questions?
- What about when the Bible has attitudes we don't share eg Levirate marriage, toleration of polygamy, uncleanness due to discharge
- "If men get into a fight with one another, and the wife of one intervenes to rescue her husband from the grip of his opponent by reaching out and seizing his genitals, you shall cut off her hand; show no pity" (Deut. 25:11f.)
- Should we consider putting homosexuals to death in obedience to Leviticus?
 - We all agree there are parts of the Bible that don't apply today

Appealing to Scripture

- Top 15 Biblical Ways to Acquire A Wife!
- Important question on marriage and intimate relationships!
- Any positive comments on method?
- Any critical comments on method?
- What more general question of method can you frame to help with appealing to Scripture in other areas in light of answers?

But....

- What is this 'sexual immorality' which we must flee?
 - We need some wider context to understand the commands...
 - We need to be able to identify what it includes today....
- Do we insist on other commandments from Leviticus?
 - We need to be consistent not selective...

So how do we appeal to Scripture to help us?

- Don't narrow down too quickly – try to see big picture of issue you need guidance on
- Read individual texts carefully
- Listen to individual texts in context of whole Bible
- Listen to ALL relevant texts
 - Not just your favourite or the easiest
 - Not just commands but parables, stories...
- Understand Scripture as the story or drama of God's call and work

What is the drama/story?

- Act One – Creation and Fall
- Act Two – Redemption: Israel
- Act Three – Redemption: Jesus Christ
- Act Four – Redemption: Church (Scene 1 in NT, extra-biblical scenes in tradition)
- Act Five – Consummation: New Creation
- This drama to shape us as players in Act Four

And don't forget....

- Sometimes we can over-complicate
- "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me. It's the parts I do understand" (Mark Twain)
- We should read in order to hear and then obey
- "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Act One: God's Good Creation

Act One: Creation

- Why? Just because 'start at the very beginning...?'
- Also - Importance of this act shown by Christ (eg Mt 19) in his discussion of marriage and of divorce and remarriage
- Reminds us that here as in other areas of ethics important to think about how we flourish as human creatures

Genesis 1

- Importance of context before focus on specific text of vv27, 28
- See significance of order – God has created order out of chaos and our role and freedom requires respect for that order
- See significance of human beings (v26)
 - Divine deliberation ('let us...')
 - Special status ('made in God's image')
 - Special calling ('let them rule...')

Genesis 1.27

- Generic category – humanity divided into two not into kinds: 'male and female'
- Human sexual differentiation a fundamental creation distinction
- Image of God – what is it?
 - Faculty or capacity eg rationality
 - Calling – to rule over creation
 - Being male and female - community

Genesis 1.28

- Continuity with wider creation
 - Be fruitful and increase in number (v22)
 - Importance of procreation which is first command in Scripture
- Different from animals and wider creation – calling and ability to rule and subdue

Genesis 1 Summary

- Three key lessons and building blocks for any Christian vision of sex, marriage and intimate relationships
- Human beings are created as one kind but are sexually differentiated by God's creative act into male and female
- Human beings, though similar to rest of creation, are also special and distinct within creation – made in God's image
- Human beings created, called and commanded to pursue the good of procreation

Genesis 2

- Move from global sweep of Gen 1 to focus on humanity
- Shocking phrase – “It is not good...”
- Divinely proclaimed flaw and insufficiency – not good that the man is alone
- Made as relational creatures who need intimate, loving relationship – with God and with others

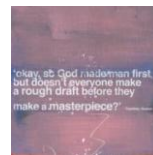
Gen 2:18-20 – Solution to the problem

- “I will make....” – Provision of helper is creative work of God not of *adam*
- “...a helper...” – term most often used in OT for God as helper of Israel
- “...suitable for him” – desire for a fit, for complementarity
- But (vv19-20) – nothing meets these requirements

Gen 2:21-23 – Solution to the problem

- Begins not with the earth (cf vv7, 19) but with man himself (v21)
- Man is passive – put to sleep – and part of him removed
- Male and female not different kinds (Mars/Venus) but distinction within fundamental unity
- Distinction and other-ness so mutuality, relationship, delight and joy (v23)
- “Naming” is poetic play on words not exertion of authority (cf 3.20)

Act One – Creation Order?



“Okay,
so God made man
first,
but doesn’t everyone
make a rough draft
before they make a
masterpiece?”
(Courtney Huston)

Gen 2 – Summary of key points

- Man was created first but it was not good for him to be alone – he needed a suitable helper with whom he could be in relationship and communion
- Woman was created by God out of man to meet his need (though note Paul makes this relationship reciprocal in the Lord in 1 Cor 11.11,12).
- Man recognises and delights in the woman who is other than him and yet also in a sense part of him – “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh”.

Act One: Humanity’s Rebellion

Act One – Humanity’s Rebellion: Genesis 4-11

- Cain & Abel – fratricide
- Lamech – polygamy (4.19)
- Noah & abuse within the family leading to curse (Gen 9)
- Sin woven into human sexuality and family relationships and structures in a fallen world

Gen 2:24 - Marriage

- Significance of marriage as a gift of God in creation
- Focus here is on relationship and meeting lack in being alone
- Importance of male and female in marriage
- Marriage involves clear and public breaking of blood ties and new social relationship
- Two become one flesh – sexual but wider

Act One – Humanity’s Rebellion: Genesis 3 & 4

- Gen 3 and story of Fall focuses on the relationship between Adam and Eve
- Issues of sexuality and gender strongly affected by human disobedience and disorder that results in creation
- Damage to marriage relationship in God’s judgment – 3.16
- 4.1 – danger of saying sex is bad but perhaps see how it can try to offer solace for absence of God?

Act One – Humanity’s Rebellion: Disordered Sexuality & Intimacy

- In Romans 1 Paul retells the story of creation and fall and relates it to sexuality
- ‘God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another’
- ‘God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another’

Act Two: Redemption - Israel

What is this?



- Your eyes are like doves behind your veil...Your hair is like a flock of goats...
- Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes...Your lips are like a scarlet thread
- Your temples are like a slice of pomegranate...Your neck is like the tower of David built with rows of stones on which are hung a thousand shields...
- Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle which feed among the lilies...
- Your lips, my bride, drip honey, Honey and milk are under your tongue...
- Your belly is like a heap of wheat...
- Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, which faces towards Damascus

Marriage in OT Prophecy

- God embraces human marriage as symbol of his own covenant love for Israel
- Only in Prov 2.17 and Mal 2 that marriage named as a covenant BUT
- Hosea; Jeremiah (2.20, 3.1,20, 31.3ff); Ezekiel (16 & 23); Isaiah (50.1, 54.6-8, 62.4ff)
- Marriage to mirror God's dealings with us – commitment and promise of faithful love and provision

Mess & Brokenness in OT

- Messy and broken sexuality, marriage, family and intimate relationships
 - Abraham with Sarah & Hagar
 - Jacob & Esau, Joseph and his brothers
 - Samson, Eli, David, Solomon
 - Sexual abuse
 - Polygamy
 - Infertility
 - Resources for today....?

Jesus' Celibacy

- Can be so pro-marriage that lose significance of this
- Jewish views exalt marriage and challenge single life
- Similar attitudes in Greco-Roman world
- Jesus therefore highly counter-cultural here as in other areas

Act Three – Redemption: Christ

Jesus' Relationships

- Jesus' attitude to those treated as on margins or outcasts, sometimes because of their sex or pattern of relationships
- Jn 4 and Lk 7 as examples of loving, gracious response
- Classic example - Jn 8 and woman caught in adultery

Jesus' Teaching

- Sex and marriage not central but important and significant
- Reaffirm and extend traditional Jewish teaching on sexual conduct
 - Adultery encompass also lust (Mt 5.27)
 - Corrupt heart issues in sexual immorality among other sins (Mk 7.20ff)
 - Strong words against divorce and remarriage, nothing on homosexuality
- Teaching on marriage often explicitly draws back to God's purposes in creation

Act Four – Redemption: The Church

Marriage in Ephesians 5

- Builds on OT prophecy and relates to Christ and the church
- Quotes Gen 2.24 (in v31) and says "This is a profound mystery – I am talking about Christ and the church"
- Reaffirms link between male-female sexual relationship and God's covenant relationship with us

Whose body is it anyway?

- 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?' (1 Cor 6.15)
- 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body' (1 Cor 6.19-20)
- Need to think about our bodies and intimate relationships in light of this.

Whose body is it anyway?

- 'The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife' (1 Cor 7.4)
- In marriage there is a total self-giving, handing over of oneself to one's spouse – body belongs to Christ and to spouse

1 Cor 7

- Best commentaries – Fee, Hays, Thiselton
- Paul clearly personally favours singleness but not as anti-marriage as sometimes seem
- Verse 1 – about sexual relations ('touch') not marriage and probably Cor. View
- Verses 2-4 – Equalisation in marriage and affirmation of sexual intimacy
- Verse 5-7 – Concession (v6) is abstention for a time not sex !

Sex in the Bible – NT Commands

- Dangers of thinking about ethics solely in terms of commands but important
- Give limits and prohibitions – sexual purity and fidelity important to identity of God's people
- Examples 1 Thess 4.3-8; Heb 13.4
- Rules not anti-sex, not aiming to limit true humanity but given to enable us to flourish

Sex in the Bible – House of Bishops' Summary

- "In the New Testament...the ethical ideal is that sexual activity is to be confined within faithful, heterosexual marriage, normally lifelong...there is also...a conscious focussing...on breach of the sexual rules as one of the sins most likely to endanger the security of salvation for Christians" (*Issues in Human Sexuality*, 2.13).

Act Five – New Creation

No marriage in heaven...

- 'The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage' (Lk 20)
- Reminder to keep issues in proper perspective...

Conclusion

- Found relevant teaching in all main parts of Scripture – Law, Writings, Prophets, Gospels, Epistles
- Christian vision can be drawn from narratives, poetry, images, symbols, commands
- Root thinking in broader teaching – creation, Christ, character of God, covenant
- Coherence and attractive vision for confused cultural context

How shall we therefore live?

Key issues need to consider

- God's purposes in creation
 - Male and female
 - Marriage
- The effects of human sin on our sexuality
- God's redemptive purposes
 - The link between marriage and covenant
 - The pattern of Jesus' life
 - The importance of our bodies