

The Gift of Sexuality

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In Eden God gave wonderful gifts to humanity. Two have survived Paradise, the Sabbath and marriage. These are supposed to be enjoyed and celebrated. Heterosexual marriage is about companionship, love, and mutual support. It is also the place to use the gift of sexual intimacy. When we talk about stewardship of our bodies, this includes this very gift.

I. Marriage in the Old Testament

1. *The Institution and Meaning of Marriage*

Marriage differs from non-marital sexual relations by its public and legal recognition. It was instituted when God created the first human couple. Therefore we have to go back to the creation account when we talk about marriage.

- Gen 1:26-27 - Both men and women were created in the image of God in spite of their sexual differentiation.
- Gen 1:28 - The first divine mandate for humanity used the plural. That means that the woman had a special status, comparable to that of Adam, which was unique among ancient Near Eastern religions.
- Gen 2:18-23 - Man and woman are created for each other. They share a common identity and are of the same value and coequal. God took Eve, brought her to Adam (Gen 2:22), and performed the first wedding.
- Gen 2:24 - This verse contains five characteristics of marriage as designed by God:
- (1) Marriage has a clear beginning. The husband leaves his parental family and becomes somewhat independent, ready to enter into an intimate union with his wife.
 - (2) God's will is heterosexual monogamy.
 - (3) Marriage is complete companionship. It is about becoming one in thinking and feeling, in will and action, climaxing in becoming "one flesh."
 - (4) In its character marriage is indissoluble. It is a union marked by trust and faithfulness.
 - (5) Marriage is the legitimate place for sexual intimacy.

God created marriage. It is not a human but a divine invention.

2. *The Wedding*

In the Old Testament (OT) a wedding was connected to the following steps:

- *Courtship*
Typically parents selected spouses for their children (Gen 21:21; 24). However, there were also cases when the young people could choose or at least were asked (1 Sam 18:20-21; Gen 24:57-58).
- *Engagement, Marriage Contract, Bride Price (Dowry)*
It can be assumed that engagement was associated with the payment of the bride price (Gen 34:12; Exod 22:16; 1 Sam 18:25)
- *Wedding Ritual*
The wedding consisted of three elements, (a) the wedding procession (Judg 14:11; Ps 45:14-16), (b) the marriage banquet (Gen 29:22; Judg 14:12, 17), and (c) the wedding night (Gen 29:22-23; Deut 22:13-21)

In the OT marriage was neither a private matter between a man and a woman nor a form of concubinage, but a public event involving the families and the community. It has legal implications. Sexual intimacy by itself does not constitute a marriage, but is the consummation of the marriage after the other steps have been taken.

II. Marriage in the New Testament

With regard to marriage, the New Testament (NT) follows the OT and does not develop a new form of marriage. This is not an exception because other OT teachings and institutions are also presupposed and continued in the NT, such as creation, the Decalogue, and the Sabbath.

- Jesus - He participated in a wedding (John 2) and referred to marriage in various places, dealing with marriage (references to the creation account; various parables, e. g. , Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-13), adultery, and divorce (Matt 5:27-32; 19:1-10). He also made provisions for remaining single (Matt 19:12).
- Paul - He dealt with marriage and related aspects in various places (e. g. , 1 Cor 7). In Eph 5:22-33 he compared marriage of a man and a woman with the relationship between Jesus and his church. This appreciation of marriage has deeply influenced Christianity.
- Matt 1:18-20 - Maria and Joseph are engaged but not yet involved in sexual intimacy.
- Matt 19:5 - Jesus refers back to Gen 2:24 and stresses the permanence of marriage.
- John 8:41 - The Jews suggested that Jesus was an illegitimate child, looking down upon him.
- 1 Cor 7:8-9 - A legitimate alternative to getting married is not to cohabit but to “burn” (with passion).

According to the NT, marriage was instituted by God at creation. The NT maintains the marriage constituting elements of the OT. Again, marriage is not just a private matter but has a public and legal character. Premarital virginity is stressed. In both Testaments marriage is protected by God in a special way (Mal 2:14-16; Matt 19:4-6). Therefore, Christians commit themselves to their spouses publicly, exclusively, and permanently, seeking God’s blessing in the community of believers.

III. Sexuality Gone Wrong

1 Cor 6:9-11 - This passage and its context answer the following questions:

1. Why Should Christians Avoid Sexual Sins?

- Because there is a kingdom to gain. A misuse of the gift of sexuality does not square with God’s rule and his kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-10).
- Immorality is damaging. It harms or destroys relationships with spouse, family, friends, and neighbors (1 Cor 7:10-14). It harms the relationship with God (1 Cor 6:15; 7:35). And it harms ourselves—emotionally, psychologically, and physically (1 Cor 6:18). God wants us to live fulfilled lives (John 10:10).

2. What Are Sexual Sins?

- *Fornication:* Fornication is a broad concept in Scripture and typically includes all sins of a sexual nature such as premarital sex, adultery, incest, homosexuality, sodomy, and others. However, if it is listed with some or all of these other sins, it may describe premarital sexual intimacy (see Heb 13:4).
- *Adultery:* Adultery describes a sexual affair with a person other than one’s spouse (John 8:3-11; 1 Cor 6:15-20).
- *Homosexual Activity:* In 1 Cor 6:9 the effeminate seems to play the female in a homoerotic relationship, while the second Greek term, *asernokoitēs*, the male who lies with a male, obviously describes the one playing the male in such a relationship. See also Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26-27.
- *Incest:* Incest describes a sexual relationship with a close relative (1 Cor 5:1-2; Lev 18:6-18).
- *Divorce:* Following Jesus who had addressed the matter of divorce (Matt 19:1-10; Mark 10:1-10), Paul is also opposed to divorce (1 Cor 7:10-16). See also Mal 2:16.
- *Intentional Mixed Marriages:* A widow and—by implication a widower—may remarry, but it should be “only in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39). In the context of 1 Cor 5-7 this has been understood as a warning against a marriage with an unbeliever whatever philosophy of life this person would adhere to other than true biblical faith. See also Deut 7:3; Neh 13:23-25.

3. *Why is there still hope for sinners?*

The last part of our passage is full of hope: “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). If we have failed and sinned, forgiveness and a new beginning are possible through God’s grace. Yet Jesus challenges us also: “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Conclusion

God has given humanity the gift of marriage including sexual intimacy. This gift of true love needs to be treasured, kept pure, and protected against abuse. It is a symbol of our relationship with the Lord.

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