



Class: Ethics of Sex in the Bible

Teacher: John A. “Jack” Crabtree

Handout 2

**Part Two:
Biblical Sexual Ethics and a Biblical Theory of Sex**

I. Marriage and sexual ethics in the Bible

- A. One cannot understand biblical sexual ethics without understanding the biblical concept of marriage and the Bible’s understanding of the relationship between sex and marriage.
- B. In the Bible, no act of sexual intimacy is righteous if it is not within the context of marriage. If one understands why this is so, then he is in a position to understand much of what the Bible teaches with regard to sexual ethics.

II. Purpose and design of marriage in biblical teaching

- A. Biblical definition of marriage (Genesis 2:24):
 - 1. Marriage is a moral commitment to ...
 - a) leave father and mother and cleave to one’s wife;
 - b) become “one flesh.”
 - 2. Marriage is not a metaphysical fact; it is a relationship that is created by keeping the promises that were made to one another.
 - 3. Therefore, the marriage commitment of a man to a woman is a moral commitment to keep those promises he made (or should have made) to the woman he is marrying: to keep his promise to “leave father and mother and cleave to her,” and to keep his promise to “become one flesh” with her.
- B. The “love” of marriage (very different from the romantic love we often speak of) is a moral commitment to promote the well-being of another human being. Specifically, it is a moral commitment to promote the well-being of my spouse by keeping the promises I made to her, and vice versa.
 - 1. This commitment to love one another in this way is a commitment to forge this relationship across the sexual difference between male and female.
 - a) The difference between the sexes is perhaps the greatest difference than can exist between two human beings.
 - (1) Arguably, no other difference between individual human beings is as great and as foundational as the difference between male and female.
 - (2) It seems entirely possible to me that the sexual difference between male and female may very well be an eternal difference.



- b) The difference between the sexes is what makes marriage particularly challenging. Two human beings who are fundamentally very different are committed to sharing ONE human existence.
 - (1) Such a promise cannot be kept apart from a moral commitment to love one another across and in spite of a significant difference between the marriage partners.
- 2. The marriage commitment is a commitment to love one's spouse by making a "special" commitment to one's spouse to make her/him the most special person in his/her life.
 - a) The marriage relationship (so defined) holds out the potential to satisfy a fundamental longing of the human heart to be someone, to be important; it could satisfy our desire not to be invisible or insignificant, our desire not to be alone.
- 3. The marriage commitment is unique; it is a commitment to only that one person.
- 4. The marriage commitment is enduring (life-long).
 - a) Reflective of the *hesed* of God.
- 5. The marriage commitment does not become "inward" and "us-centered" but is "outward" and "other-centered."
 - a) Particularly toward the other human beings we create and bring into the world.
 - (1) NOTE that "romantic love" does not include children; it excludes them.
 - b) Married people who are practicing and experiencing marital (moral) LOVE become partners in loving others; they will not be a "couple" that closes itself off to others in order to become absorbed with one another.
 - (1) NOTE that "romantic love" and the coupling that it produces is the very antithesis of this.

III. Romantic love in the teaching of the Bible

- A. With the exception of Song of Solomon, you would be hard-pressed to find anywhere in the Bible that even acknowledges the existence of romantic love.
- B. So, the LOVE that is foundational to the marriage relationship is not what we "feel" about another human being. This LOVE is what we CHOOSE TO DO in relation to another human being.
 - 1. "Romantic love" is a very real phenomenon, but— from the perspective of the biblical worldview— it HAS NO PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT BEARING on marriage, the marriage commitment, the choice of whom to marry, on sexual behavior, or on anything else pertaining to sex or marriage.
 - a) In the biblical worldview, feeling like you are "in love" with someone is not, in and of itself, a moral justification to be sexually intimate with him or her.



IV. The God-given design of sex

A. Pleasure

1. God designed sex to be pleasurable, but pleasure is not its primary purpose, nor even an essential purpose.

B. Procreation

1. God designed sex for procreation, but procreation is not its primary purpose, nor even an essential purpose.

C. Communication, through physical, sexual contact

1. This is built in to the very nature of sexual intimacy.
 - a) Sexual intimacy is fundamentally an intimate knowledge given to one another.
 - (1) A husband “knows” his wife.
 - (a) Means: a husband “chooses” his wife to bring her into an intimate relationship to himself.
 - (b) Does not mean that sexual intimacy automatically leads to knowledge of one’s partner.
2. A “natural language”: it has an inherent, God-given meaning.
 - a) I promise you all of me and all that is mine (necessary meaning).
 - b) I promise you that you are “special” to me (necessary meaning).
 - c) I promise you that you will be uniquely special to me (potential meaning, if I reserve sexual intimacy for my spouse).
3. Its meaning and significance:
 - a) Through the language of one’s body, sexual intimacy expresses the marital commitment. It makes the promises of a husband and wife to one another.
4. Its purpose:
 - a) With respect to the marriage commitment that a man and woman make to one another, it expresses the promises of a man and woman to one another in a manner such that, through sexual intimacy, they...
 - (1) celebrate that mutual commitment;
 - (2) ratify that mutual commitment;
 - (3) reinforce and strengthen that mutual commitment.
 - b) Procreation, while one of the purposes of sex, is not the only purpose. Nor is it even the first, and most important, purpose of sex for human beings.
 - (1) In animal sexuality, the sole purpose of sex is procreation. Sex is something animals engage in typically when procreation is possible or likely. Human sexuality is distinctively different from animal sexuality in this regard.



- (2) On the other hand, God's design clearly integrates human sexuality with procreation. God's purpose involves new human beings being nurtured in exactly the environment of mutual love and commitment that the marriage commitment was designed to create.
 - (a) It is perverse, therefore, to try to separate what God has put together. That is, to separate sex from procreation altogether is to rebel against God's design.

V. Biblical sexual ethics

- A. Biblical sexual ethics derives entirely from the nature and purpose of sexuality and sexual intimacy as God designed it and purposed it. What is in keeping with God's design and purpose is righteous, moral, and permissible. What is NOT in keeping with God's design and purpose is unrighteous, immoral, and impermissible.
 1. Sexual purity = acting in keeping with and desiring only that which is consistent with God's design and purpose for sexuality.
 - a) It is unrighteous to BEHAVE sexually in any manner that is inconsistent with the God-given purposes of sexual intimacy.
 - b) It is unrighteous to DESIRE to behave sexually in any manner that is inconsistent with the God-given purposes of sexual intimacy.
- B. Various kinds of sexual sin:
 1. Sexual sins overlap the following categories. Often, a sexual behavior is immoral for more than one reason.
 2. Sexual behavior that defrauds another person is unrighteous.
 - a) Adultery.
 - (1) Romans 13:9. Note adultery is seen as violating command to love neighbor.
 - b) Fornication, any sexual intimacy outside the context of a marriage commitment.
 - (1) Including "messaging around" / non-coital foreplay.
 3. Perversion (distorting [twisting] the nature) of one's sexuality is unrighteous [*porneia*, Galatians 5:19].
 - a) Sensuality (twisting one's sexuality by emphasizing that which is not most important, namely pleasure) [*aselgeia*, Galatians 5:19].
 - b) Using sex as a drug (dissipation, the wasting of one's life, refusal to face reality) [*aselgeia*, Galatians 5:19].
 - (1) Casual sex
 - (a) Including "messaging around" / non-coital foreplay.
 - (2) Pornography



- (3) Sexual obsession
- (4) Sexual addiction
- c) Morally disgusting sexual practices and desires (rebellious bestializing of sex) [*akatharsia*, "uncleanness," Galatians 5:19]:
 - (1) Many heterosexual practices encouraged by a highly sexualized culture (even practiced within the context of marriage) are a perversion of our sexuality.
 - (2) Homosexuality.
 - (3) Any other widely divergent or perverse sexual behavior and/or desire (invented or not yet invented).