

Back to Genesis #3

“God’s Definition of Marriage and Proper Sexual Conduct”

Intro: Over fifty years ago a new movement emerged in American life that was to have a profound impact on our generation. That movement sometimes referred to as “the Sexual Revolution” was a counter-cultural social revolution. It was anti-authoritarian and saw the suburban family along with its morality of self-restraint, hard work, and moral Puritanism as an expression of class domination. Thus its advocates, making use of the power of sexual libido, unleashed a philosophy of “free love” that rejected traditional Judeo-Christian values. It left a lasting impression upon our society in several important ways.

Sexuality became political, emerged as an axis around which new social movements organized.

It produced shifts in the relationship between women and men, particularly those inspired by the emergent women’s liberation movements. This was paralleled women’s increased presence in the public realm and personal autonomy concerning reproductive choices and sexual expression.

Accompanying the movement was the political mobilization of the gay & lesbian movements.

There resulting a destabilizing of the rigid boundary between the private family and the individualistic-orientated public realm.

It fostered reforms in the legal and medical regulation of sexuality including establishing the "right" to terminate a pregnancy in abortion.

The movement increased commercialization and commoditization of sexuality through pornography and in the mass media. Censorship laws were relaxed to allow more "freedom" to those who wanted to watch or to purvey sexually suggestive media.

In a word, it helps us understand why we are in the mess we’re in. So we live in a world where:

People in the general population are more sexually permissive. A great percentage of unmarried teens and adults are sexually active.

Pornographic images in varying degrees are everywhere.

Homosexual marriage has become a major political issue. (Just this week a federal judge struck down a law in Alabama defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman & forbidding same-sex marriages.)

There are even now modern advocates of legalized prostitution.

What is the solution to all this? We must go "Back to Genesis." In our two past lessons we considered the implications of divine creation (Gen. 1:1), and the unique nature that God has given people made in His image and the implications it has for defining right and wrong. Now let turn our attention to the institution of marriage and God’s design for this relationship (Gen. 1-2).

God creation intention for marriage

Genesis one and two provide us with a clear statement of God's creation intention for marriage.

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:27-28)

And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:22-24)

What are the implications in this verse for defining a marriage?

A divinely authorized marriage joins together one man and one woman.

God instituted the marriage relationship as a heterosexual and not a homosexual relationship.

The OT teaching builds upon these foundational principles.

God characterized the sin of Sodom in this way:

And the Lord said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. (Gen. 18:20).

The sexual legislation of the Law forbade homosexual relationships.

'You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. (Lev. 18:22)

The NT teaching likewise builds upon these foundational principles:

Jesus acknowledged the truth of Genesis 2 in the constitution of marriage in his answer to the Pharisees about divorce:

And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Matthew 19:4-5)

Sometimes it is argued that Jesus never condemned homosexual relationships. It is simply a matter of not wanting to see the obvious!

First such relationships were not common in Jewish society, especially in view of the OT teaching. Jesus did not have the occasion to address the issue directly. Second Jesus implicitly condemned the relationship in two ways:

By affirming the truth of the OT Scriptures (Jn. 10:35).

If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), (John 10:35)

By applying that truth to His disciples (Mk. 7:20-23)

And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:20-23)

By "fornications" Jesus refers to the specific laws of Leviticus that define improper sexual conduct as "fornication".

Homosexuality was commonly practiced among the Gentiles, especially the Greeks; but when the gospel was carried to those places those who practiced the sin were required to repent and leave their homosexual relationships; and they did!

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And 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 Corinthians 6:9-11).

God reserved marriage as the proper relationship for sexual activity and procreation.

God's intention was that the human family be perpetuated.

And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28)

The sexual relationship exists in part to fulfill the Creator's purpose of filling the world God made with inhabitants.

God's law from the beginning upheld the sanctity of sexual activity in the context of marriage and not outside it.

God's laws were designed to discourage sexual activity outside marriage among the unmarried.

And if a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife. If her father absolutely

refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins. (Exodus 22:16-17)

The severest punishment was met out upon the person who violated the marriage of another in adultery.

If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:10)

Jesus' teaching for His disciples focused on God's original intention for marriage. Looking past the Mosaic toleration of both divorce and polygamy, Jesus taught his disciples that those who are divorced and remarried commit adultery, except in cases where fornication is the cause of divorce.

And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9)

In addition, he held culpable the person who ended the marriage for causes others than fornication for the consequent adultery that results from a second marriage.

but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

But most importantly he addressed the root of all sexual immorality, the lingering gaze upon someone to which one has no right.

but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)

Likewise the Hebrew writer urges God's people to live in sexual purity.

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4)

All these statements reflect the restoration of God's original creation intention concerning marriage. In fact can you see that the redemption we have in Christ takes us "back to Genesis"; it is really a restoration of fallen man to his original created condition:

There is the restoration of God in our hearts as Creator.

There is the restoration of the image of God as the basis for all our actions.

There is the restoration of the unity of the husband and wife.

All of these are a part of the creation mandates found in Genesis 1-2.

Conclusion: Though the world will as always continue to reject the Creator and His plan for mankind and for the home, we must not allow ourselves to be conditioned by the culture to live as the world. Today it is important that we too go back to Genesis for a pattern of how God intends for us to live.