

The following is a workshop summary from the “MAKING ROOM FOR ALL” CONFERENCE, held in Grand Rapids October 29-31, 2009

**SIX FACTORS SHAPING THE BIBLE’S  
CONCERNS REGARDING SEXUALITY  
Suggested by Norman J. Kansfield**

**Presupposition:** Persons do not choose their sexual identity/orientation. It is genetically determined in the same way that race or handedness is. It is, therefore, a gift and a calling from God.

**I. The family was the core unit of society and culture in the Old Testament (OT).**

- A. Personal membership in God’s chosen people was primarily through one’s family.
- B. The family was crucial to the continuation of Israel.
- C. Pivotal institutions, such as the priesthood and the kingship, were defined by family.
- D. There was, therefore, no social imperative more compelling than the one that required a man to devote himself to the maintenance and improvement of his family. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, p. 168.

**II. This meant that marriage was a very different institution during biblical times.**

- A. In biblical Hebrew, there is no specific word for “marriage,” nor is there a verb “to marry,” nor is there any evidence of anything like a marriage ceremony.
  - 1. The term most commonly used in the Old Testament is one which suggests: “to become the *baal* – that is, lord or owner – of a woman.”
  - 2. To “make a marriage” carried the same sense as to transact a business deal.
- B. In New Testament Greek, the word for “marriage” finds its root in *gamos*.
  - 1. This word lacks any religious or ceremonial significance. *Gamos* is used to describe the condition of being married, as well as a feast in celebration of a marriage.
  - 2. This feast does appear to have ceremoniously marked the beginning of a marriage, and could, therefore, be understood as “a marriage.”

- C. Throughout the biblical era, marriage was used by families as a means for the accumulation and stabilization of wealth. Countryman, pp. 147-167.
1. All marriages were arranged.
  2. Every male was expected to marry.
    - a. Genesis 1.23 – “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” – is still regarded by traditional Judaism as “the first commandment.”
    - b. For a male not to marry placed his family in jeopardy.
  3. Each wife’s dowry added to the wealth or financial stability of any husband and his family.
    - a. A dowry was required, no matter how poor the bride’s family was.
    - b. Any woman without a dowry was in a most difficult social position.
  4. These factors are illustrated on the one hand by King Solomon having 700 wives (and, therefore, enormous wealth) and by the place of one’s wife in the Ten Commandments (among a man’s property and after his house).
- D. A second focus of marriage was upon the continuation of the family and tribe (or even for the future of the race).
1. Well into the nineteenth century it was believed that the whole new human being was contained in the male semen.
    - a. For this reason, male sperm was never to be in any way wasted.
    - b. A wife was simply an incubator for the development of the person prior to birth.
    - c. Women were therefore spoken of in terms similar to those used for farmland – fertile etc.
    - d. The word “conception” has its root in the verb “to take” or “to receive seed, to be sown.”
  2. For these reasons, it was the male’s family that was the focus of human life and relationships.
    - a. Thus the importance of genealogies in the Bible.
    - b. Thus the great danger of adultery – the intrusion within a marriage with the risk of “adulterating” the family line.

**EXCURSUS:** This Doesn’t Tell the Whole Old Testament Story

- A. Jacob, Leah, and Rachel suggest that love could and did play a role within at least some marriages.
- B. The Song of Songs is a passionate portrayal of romantic love.
- C. God’s used Hosea’s marriage to Gomer as a representation of God’s love of and marriage to Israel (Hosea 1-3).

### **III. Every Biblical Law that Concerns Itself with Human Sexual Relationships Was Written within the Context of Marriage as Described in A through D above.**

- A. This is why there is not a single mention of female same-sex relationships in scripture.
- B. This means that the male/male sexual experiences which were specifically forbidden in Scripture:
  - 1. Were understood within this context as an adulterous act, since every male was expected to marry.
  - 2. Were each an act against two marriages.
  - 3. Were regarded as “wasting seed” that should have been “planted” in their wives. (See even the “sinfulness” of “Onanism” – Genesis 38.9-10).
  - 4. Were regarded as an activity that could be misinterpreted as religious worship of another God, because of the worship practices of other nations (See Exodus 18.21-23).
- C. These laws in no way could have envisioned monogamous long-term same-sex relationships such as those desired today.
- D. Both explicit references in the book of Leviticus (18. 22 and 20. 13) call male/male sex an “abomination.”
  - 1. In most other OT passages where “abomination” is used, the reference is to acts of worship as practiced by other nations. Indeed, Leviticus 18.26-30, which immediately follows the Leviticus 18. 22 reference of male/male sex makes it clear that such acts of worship make the land so ill that the land “vomits” out its people for such religious practices.
    - a. This has led some experts to conclude that the male/male sex referenced in Leviticus was temple prostitution.
    - b. The verse preceding Lev. 18. 22 also furthers this interpretation.
  - 2. The word “abomination” refers to something that literally “turns one’s stomach.” In Genesis 46.34, Joseph counsels his brothers to lie about their profession because “every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.”
    - a. Eating shrimp is similarly called an “abomination” (although a different Hebrew word is used in that case – Leviticus 11.10).
    - b. This has encouraged some experts to propose that the prohibition against male/male sex was, like so many other kosher laws, aimed at eliminating the most potent sources of infection from the fabric of daily ancient communal existence – eating pork, contact with dead bodies, intercourse with women during menstrual flow, etc.

**IV. St. Paul, in his letters, adds “lust” and concern for human relationships to the biblical discussions of male/male sex.**

- A. Paul begins his letter to the Romans with a rhetorical argument intended to convince his readers that everyone – Gentiles and Jews alike – had equal need of salvation in Jesus Christ. Of the Gentiles, Paul states that even though they “knew God, they did not honor God as God . . . . and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images . . . .” Romans 1. 24-25
- B. God’s response, Paul says, was to give them up to impurity “in the lusts – the “out-of-control desire” – of their hearts.”
- C. For Paul, lust always led to the distortion and perversion of relationships.
1. In Romans 1, lust distorted the relationship to God, which in turn led ultimately to the distortion of human sexual relationships.
  2. In Galatians 5. 16-24 a long list of the sins that distort human relationships are documented as the result of lust (The list of sins in I Corinthians 6.9 should be understood in this light – See below).
- D. It is, therefore, a sexuality perverted by lust that is Paul’s concern, not male/male relationships per se.
- E. St. Paul, in each of his references to male/male sex, urged all of us who are secure in God’s grace to recognize the reality that our need for that grace was and is as great as anyone else’s:
- “Therefore you have no excuse, O mortal, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him or her you condemn yourself, because you the judge are doing the very same things.” Romans 2.1
- F. St. Paul creates “sin lists” – groups of sins each of which distorts, or demeans, or takes advantage of a human relationship.
- He begins such a list in I Corinthians 6.9ff:
- “These persons will not inherit the kingdom of God: neither the immoral [those who have no concern about impact of their acts on others], nor idolaters [who have no concern for God], nor adulterers [who have no concern for their wives], nor sexual perverts [those who have no concern for sexual partners].”
- Two technical terms related to male/male sexuality are used at this point in the Greek original – *malokai*, who were male prostitutes, and *arsenokoitês*, who were males who misused personal power to subvert other males for sex.
- G. For St. Paul, therefore, it is the quality of human relationships that counts.

## V. God Changes God's Mind

- A. Scripture provides us with many examples of God's willingness and ability to change requirements that God had earlier made.
1. After Moses interceded on Israel's behalf (after the incident of the golden calf), we are told that "the LORD repented of the evil that God had thought to do to God's people." Exodus 32.14  
Exodus 34.6-7 then defines God using these characteristics:  
"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children."  
2. Jonah became very angry with the LORD expressly because Jonah was sure, even before he set out for Nineveh, that God would not remain adamant against Nineveh. When Nineveh repented, God forgave them and cancelled God's threatened punishment. Jonah 4.1-9  
Jonah then uses words very similar to Exodus 34.6-7, when he complains about God:  
"I pray you, LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my own country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and that you repent of evil." Jonah 4. 2
- B. In Deuteronomy 23.1-6, we find three specific groups of persons who were to be denied admission to the Assembly of the LORD – males whose genitals were injured, illegitimate children, and Ammonites or Moabites. That's what God said.
1. But Ruth, a Moabite woman, was allowed in and became King David's great-grandmother.
  2. And Isaiah 56 welcomed both the eunuchs and the foreigners into God's house, expressly because that House was to "be called a house of prayer for all people." Isaiah 56.1-8
  3. So, just because God once spoke against the inclusion of some persons within the church, does not mean that God continues to desire their exclusion.
  4. God is always working for the inclusion of more persons within the Assembly of the LORD. We must work to catch up with God.
  5. Peter's experience in Acts 10 further documents this truth. Peter was not prepared for the inclusion of Gentiles into the otherwise Jewish church of

Jesus Christ. To prepare Peter for the baptism of Cornelius (a Roman Centurian) and his household, God sent a vision of a sheet, let down from heaven, and including animals that were not kosher to eat. God instructed Peter: “Kill and eat!” Peter protested that he had “never eaten anything common or unclean.” To this, God responded, “Don’t call common or unclean that which I have called clean!”

**VI. So Jesus taught a very different understanding of family, sexuality, and the valuing of individuals.**

- A. Jesus did not marry.
  - 1. Remember the passage where the disciples tell Jesus, “Your mother and brothers are here” – Matthew 12.46-50/Mark 3.31-35/Luke 8. 19-21.
  - 2. Please also remember that John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul were also unmarried.
  - 3. The followers of Jesus were called to a new understanding of family in which it was not important “to marry or be given in marriage.”
  
- B. Jesus asked his followers to place a very different value upon family ties for his sake: “Everyone who has left father or mother or children or fields for the sake of my name will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life” – Matthew 19.29/ Mark 10. 13-16/Luke 18.15-17.
  
- C. Jesus gave a new status to women.
  
- D. After Jesus, marriage could become:
  - 1. A matter of choice, not social expectation.
  - 2. Marriage became a relationship between equals.
  - 3. Marriage partners could be chosen for love, not benefit.
  - 4. Procreation was no longer a requirement, nor even an expectation.

**Conclusion:** It is therefore my conclusion that nothing in what the Bible intends to teach in any way speaks against the full inclusion of LGBT persons within the life and ministry of the church.

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