

BIBLICAL COUNSEL REGARDING SEXUALITY, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The following was originally developed as a draft to be developed further for possible pastoral/ecclesiastical purposes. It is offered here as a Change in the Wind exclusive.

I. The Gift and Goodness of Human Sexuality

1. Human sexuality is a good gift of God Himself. It is He who created all things good; it is He who created mankind male and female; it is He who mandated them to be fruitful and multiply; and it is He who fashioned human bodies in such a way that the proper expression of human sexuality would be pleasurable.
2. All of God's gifts are good, but fallen man perverts the goodness of creation. Thus while the gift is good, many uses to which the gift is put are evil. Even as God has created every creature, and yet men have wrongly worshipped the creature rather than the one true God, so with sexuality: God has given it in goodness, but men have twisted it into things contrary to God's good and healthful intention.
3. God's creational intention with sexuality is that a man and a woman form an exclusive lifelong sexual bond. Expressions of sexuality which violate this norm, such as sexual activity between partners of the same gender; sexual activity outside of marriage; sexual activity with a partner married to someone else, are all to be regarded as contrary to God's good purpose and will.

II. The Partners in Marriage

1. According to our Lord, from the beginning marriage was designed to be between one man and one woman (Genesis 1-2; Matthew 19.8).
2. Although polygamy was countenanced in early periods of biblical history, it was never treated as normative. This is reflected particularly in the New Testament, where we are taught that those who aspire to church office must be one-woman men (1 Timothy 3.2, 12). Since church officers are not a higher class of Christian, but rather examples to the flock (1 Peter 5.3), we are taught what is right for all.

3. Marriage is a family action which is not created by either Church or civil government, but is nonetheless their concern, and in the respective mandates given them by God, both Church and civil government ought to enforce the proper bounds of marriage through the ministerial word and various appropriate forms of discipline as prescribed and informed by Scripture.

4. Believers are called upon to marry only “in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7.39). And yet if a believer is married to an unbeliever, the believer is to maintain the marriage through faithfulness and loving service (1 Corinthians 7.12-14) and so seek the salvation of the unbeliever (1 Peter 3.1-2).

5. Homosexual partnerships are nowhere countenanced in Scripture, nor are they ever to be regarded as marriage (Romans 1.24-27). Thus notwithstanding whatever decisions civil governments may take in attempting to define marriage, such redefinitions can no more alter the reality of God’s ordination than a government decree that gravity shall draw objects upward. For the nature of marriage is determined by God, rather than men.

6. While those who practice homosexual activity, along with others who are sexually immoral, idolaters, thieves, greedy, drunkards, revilers and swindlers, will not inherit the kingdom of God, they are to be the objects of Christian love, so that they may repent and be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6.9-11).

III. The Structure and Duties of Marriage

1. Marriage between man and woman has as its pattern the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5.32).

2. Just as Christ is the Head of the Church and she is to submit to Him in all things, so too the husband is the head of his wife, and she is to submit to him in all things (Ephesians 5.23-24). Just as the Church is called to honour and respect Christ, the wife is to respect her husband (Ephesians 5.33).

3. Just as Christ's headship over the Church is not a relationship of tyranny, but of self-giving service, so husbands are to love their wives and give themselves up for them (Ephesians 5.25), providing for their nurture (5.26), and in sum loving them and cherishing them as they do their own bodies (5.28-29).
4. Husbands are to take care to understand their wives and their needs, nurturing and protecting them as weaker vessels (1 Peter 3.7), remembering also that unlike Christ, other men are sinners and ought to undertake the mandate of headship with humility.
5. Inasmuch as wives are the glory of their husbands, they ought to give attention to their femininity (1 Corinthians 11.7); yet a wife is not to give herself up to vanity, but to adorn herself with the beauty of a gentle and peaceful spirit of submission (1 Peter 3.3-6).
6. As marriage is a gift of God and what He has joined together, no human being is to put asunder (Matthew 19.6), husband and wife are diligently to give themselves to their callings of love throughout their lives.

IV. Parental Discipline and Authority

1. God is the perfect Father, and He exercises real and comprehensive authority over His children.
2. God's perfect authority finds its embodiment in discipline, which is good. Indeed, it is precisely through discipline that God demonstrates that He treats us as His children (Hebrews 12.7-8). Therefore, human fathers must be prepared to imitate God in the care of their own children, which they have from His hand. Even as God disciplines us for our good, so human fathers are called to exercise discipline for the benefit of their children, that it may bear ultimate fruit even if it is painful in the short term (Hebrews 12.10-11).
3. Discipline means "instruction" and takes many forms, including rebuke. However, there are times when God's discipline of His people goes beyond words, and so too Scripture teaches that the authority given parents includes corporal discipline, signified by "the rod," which when rightly used is an action of love (Proverbs 13.24).

4. Child abuse and outright harm are not to be countenanced, as parents are stewards of the children God has placed in their care, not their ultimate owners. And yet the Bible teaches that good discipline involves pain (Hebrews 13.11), and we are not to equate carefully-weighed corporal discipline with child abuse.

5. Although the Bible testifies that God's discipline is sometimes accompanied by anger, His anger is not to be understood as a loss of temper or of self-control. Rather, God's anger is a steadfast, faithful witness against evil.

6. Parental discipline therefore should not be administered in rage, but with consistency and with an aim to administer correction of evil ways, rather than out of personal convenience.

7. God's discipline in Scripture repeatedly is accompanied by an offer of reconciliation. Nonetheless, even when such reconciliation has been effected, there are times when disciplinary consequences fall upon the people whom He has reconciled.

8. Parental discipline therefore ought always to aim to reconcile parents and children, and to maintain a right relationship. And yet this aim is not an excuse to forego all discipline, which is a necessary and good element of parenting.

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