

Sexuality in the purposes of God.

..live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Eph 4.1

Sexuality in the purposes of God

In considering the issues of sexuality and sexual conduct many begin from human experience or from the views of biologists, psychologists or social scientists. Whilst such insights may be valuable they are inevitably transitory and liable to change, by contrast the word of our God stands forever. Therefore in this paper we will be seeking to set out the will and purposes of God as he has lovingly and graciously revealed them in scripture. This means there is a clear supposition, for which no apology is made, that the scriptures are God-breathed, trustworthy, true and enduring. A list of other books which tackle the subject in more depth and taking into account other aspects is included at the end.

God's loving purpose revealed

God makes known to us in the Bible His loving purposes for mankind. Part of this plan is the state of marriage (Gen 2.24,25), in which children are to be born, and the command of God to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1.28). As God's purposes for mankind are unfolded we see that anything which breaks with this plan is rebellion. Here are included fornication (*), adultery (Ex 20.14), homosexuality (Lev 18.22) and bestiality (Lev 18.23). Whilst we may not think of them as being in the same category they are all rebellion against God. In the old covenant law code the penalty for the last three offences listed is death (Lev 20.10-16).

Although the death penalty is prescribed for these things, and others, we also see very clearly in the OT the grace and mercy of God revealed and an accommodation for the failings of fallen beings. Therefore polygamy is tolerated although in most instances where we find it there are harmful results (e.g. Rachel, Leah and their sons). Mercy is also shown in the face of sin, thus David and Bathsheba are not put to death, though their child dies and judgement falls on the

* In the Old Testament there is no specific command against fornication but rather the assumption that once it had taken place marriage should follow.

house of David. The seriousness of sin, all sin, is manifest in the sacrificial system and the shedding of blood - there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Heb 9.22) - all pointing to something greater to come.

In the old covenant we therefore see that God reveals three particular dimension of himself that are relevant to the matter of sexuality:

- God's plan and purposes - marriage and multiplying
- God's justice - His holy wrath against sin
- God's loving mercy - sacrifices, forgiveness and the remission of the penalty

Under the new covenant

With regards to the issue of sexuality the coming of Christ makes a difference but only in the way in which these three dimensions are worked out in practice. A lot could be said about God's plans in the new covenant but we will confine ourselves to the matter of sexuality.

It is Jesus in fact who gives the clearest statement of **God's purpose** for marriage and also its depth and value (Mk 10.6-9). Not only this, but he strengthens all the laws by saying that sin comes from the heart and therefore, in relation to adultery, even the desire is wrong (Mt 5.28). Jesus also focuses the purpose of obedience to the will of God by clarifying what was always the heart of the old covenant that obedience is an act of love, love for Christ (Jn 14.15).

Whilst Jesus so warmly endorses the place and importance of marriage he does not actually model it himself and says that singleness is for some both God's purpose and calling (Mt 19.12). Therefore whilst marriage is good, part of God's purpose and plan, it is more 'blessed' to remain single (1 Cor 7.40). This biblical teaching needs to be clearly stated. Those who find themselves unable or unwilling to marry are not opting for second best if they understand the blessing it can be to remain, as both Paul and our Lord were, single.

With regards to the **justice of God** the death penalty for sexual sin still stands! It is important to remember that fornication, adultery and homosexuality are among the list of things which will exclude people from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6.9,10 cf. Rom 1.24-32). However, whilst the penalty remains its execution is delayed because, as we see in the old covenant too, God is slow to anger, abounding in mercy.

It is also important to recognise that in the new covenant there is no nation state such as Israel was. It is open to civil governments to enforce the death penalty for such things but they would do well to remember the mercy of God and that we will all stand before the judgement throne as guilty sinners. Whatever the state may decide to do the church does have a duty before God to uphold his law and to reveal his character. In the NT the horror of such sin is shown by the exclusion of open sinners from fellowship (1 Cor 5.13). This is not an act to be taken lightly or quickly but it is a sign of judgement and of the penalty that hangs over unforgiven sin - being cast out of the kingdom forever. Exclusion from the fellowship is not an act of revenge or punishment, it is an act of love, a sign of the penalty that hangs over them aimed to bring them to their senses (2 Tim 2.26). Wise discipline also protects the fellowship from the creeping effects of sin. In all this it is the primary duty of the Church to proclaim the gospel of Christ, that is the remission of sins through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. It is our calling under God to call sinners to repentance and faith.

Therefore we come again to the great and unfathomable **mercy of God**. For if God treated us as our sins deserve we would be without hope (cf. Ps 103.8-10). It is out of His love that God sent His Son Jesus into the world that through His death we might find life. By the shedding of the blood of the perfect and sinless lamb of God we are redeemed (1 Pet 1.18,19). Moreover, God has given to His people the task of declaring this message of grace and mercy in all the world. The forgiveness that is offered by Christ is pure and complete, and therefore those who turn to Christ can be completely and utterly forgiven for all their sin, no matter how vile it may seem to us.

It is not open to the church of Christ to change the message we have been entrusted with, we must declare the sinfulness of sin, and the Holy Spirit will convict people of such sin, we must call people to repentance and faith and we must declare the forgiveness which can be found in Christ.

This therefore brings us back to where we began, God's purposes for mankind. Under both the old and new covenant it is the desire of God that His children should know His loving purposes and walk in them, walk in step with the Spirit. This is not an act of dutiful obedience but of love, love for Christ.

Living under God's will

To all people we declare that the loving purpose of God involves only two options in relation to sexual practice. Either that they should remain single and chaste or that they should marry and be faithful in that marriage relationship. This, as we have seen, is the clear teaching of Scripture and has been the consistent teaching of Christians through the ages.

To those who have rebelled in this way as in any other we should say that you are not alone. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. However, sin that remains unchecked will eventually destroy us and separate us from God, forever. We are all under the holy wrath of God, but if we repent (which means being sorry not just saying sorry) and turn to Christ then His promise is that we will stand before God acquitted of our sin.

To those who have found forgiveness in Christ we recall the words of Christ, 'neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more' (Jn 8.11). Our delight and joy should be to live in obedience to God's will. Turn away from all sin, whether it be sexual or otherwise, recognise God's desire for you and seek to live it out. This is never easy, in fact at times it seems all but impossible, but by the work of the Holy Spirit countless Christians through the ages has fought the same battles

against sin and won. If you do sin, you have one who pleads on your behalf - Jesus Christ the righteous (1 Jn 2.1).

Sadly it is necessary to speak finally to those who teach, for we shall receive a stricter judgement (Jas 3.1). Therefore those who teach should be especially careful to ensure that what they teach is in accordance with what God has revealed. If we lead little ones to sin then we have much to fear (Mt 18.6). Those who teach false doctrines should be excluded from the Church (1 Tim 6.5) because otherwise they can do untold harm to those under their care. Sadly it appears in this day that there are some who are leaders in our churches who are not fit to be shepherd over the flock. For those who love Christ and desire to declare His word it is not sufficient only to teach the truth, we must also oppose error.

David Phillips
General Secretary
Church Society
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Some books for further reading:

- *Simon Vibert : Conduct which honours God? (Orthos paper 14 from Fellowship of Word and Spirit)*
- *Hart, Calvert and Bainbridge : Homosexuality and Young People (from the Christian Institute)*
- *F. LaGard Smith : Sodom's Second Coming (Harvest House Publications 1993)*
- *St. Andrew's Day Statement*
- *Jeffrey Satinover : Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth (Baker 1996)*
- *ed. Brian Edwards : Homosexuals - The Straight Agenda (Day One Publications)*



For further articles and other issues see

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Church Society, Dean Wace House,
16 Rosslyn Road,
Watford WD18 0NY

Tel : 01923-235111 Fax : 01923-800363
admin@churchsociety.org