

# **RAW MATERIAL**

**STUDIES IN BIBLICAL SEXUALITY**

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**CONCLUSION**

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## CONCLUSION

The Bible would present an interesting collection of texts for the study of sexuality even if it were not Scripture for many people. But because the Bible is Canon for the church (and synagogue), the study of these texts takes on a special intensity. It is difficult to keep a clear head when reading texts which could impact your own life, and the lives of those close to you, in profound ways. These studies are offered as an attempt to clarify some texts and themes which disturb many modern readers of the Bible. Repeatedly these studies show that no topic can be understood by itself, but rather each interacts with other topics, sometimes in surprising ways.

The studies in this book do not cover all aspects of Biblical sexuality, though most topics are given some points of contact in these studies, and a few broad themes have emerged. The broadest theme is the emphasis on sexual reproduction in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the strong movement away from this value and goal in the New Testament. In the New Testament sexuality is about obedience, purity, and the sexual bond between husband and wife . . . or even between a prostitute and her client.

Sexuality is not about reproduction in the New Testament. Though sexual activity may result in a pregnancy, that is not its goal, and is not necessary in the New Testament statements on sexuality. The genealogies have run their course and lost their value. Inheritance comes by faith in the ultimate heir, Jesus, and not by legal or biological genealogy. Genesis 1:27 retains its value to declare the image of God and the value of monogamy, but not the importance of differentiating male and female. Genesis 1:28, on the other hand, is neglected and ignored in the New Testament – there is no value to being fruitful and multiplying through sex. Being fruitful and multiplying is now through evangelism.

As with reproduction, there is a dramatic change in issues of gender between the Testaments. In the laws of Moses the greatest distinction in gender is found in the sexual laws. The New Testament reduces this disparity, refusing polygamy, divorce and remarriage to men as well as women. Men retain the right of initiating divorce in Matthew and Luke (but not Mark), but have no right to remarriage. In non-sexual roles the disparity between the genders also almost disappears. Galatians 3:28 has a broader application in the New Testament than allowed by many churches today. At the very least, we cannot assume that gendered language used for church offices therefore restricts these offices by gender. Phoebe the deacon (not deaconess) shattered the “husband of one wife” barrier before the Pastoral Epistles had been written.

Celibacy, marginally treated in the Hebrew Scriptures, comes to have a positive value in the New Testament. It may not be good for a man to be alone (Gen 2:18), but some men, and some women, seem called to this life. Reproduction is no longer a goal, for there is much work to be done in evangelism. But the few texts which speak of celibacy also make clear that such a lifestyle is for only a few members of the church. The New Testament never recommends or permits the church to impose a life of celibacy on its members.

The Old Testament purity laws seem to provide the context for much of the Old Testament legal texts on sexual issues. The church's application of purity laws to specific sexual issues need not be treated differently than the application of purity laws to non-sexual issues. Christian communities could (should?) treat all purity laws with a common hermeneutic to decide their application, but I doubt this will happen any time soon.

Most important, if a church claims to recognize the Scriptures as Canon, then the community and its members are well served if they openly examine the ways in which they use, and do not use, the authority of the Canon. Any daring church member can find important inconsistencies in how a church applies the Canon. What happens next cannot be decided by a work of exegesis like this. Final decisions must be lived out, and therefore be livable, in the world of flesh and blood.

May the Lord have mercy on us all.