Living at the Crossroads: Christians and Sex in the 21st Century

On the 18th of August 2014 I spoke on Numbers 25 at church[[1]](#footnote-1). This passage is very confronting and also very rich, there are many important Biblical themes in it. Because of this I did not have time to adequately address the issue of sexual immorality which is raised by this passage. There were other issues of greater importance to address (namely idolatry and the God’s solution to it in Jesus).

The following is not a comprehensive account of the Bible’s teaching on sex, there are many good books which do a good job of that. This paper is a summary of what I would have said in the talk if I had had another 10 minutes to speak! I hope it is helpful. This is an important topic.

## What is sexual sin according to the Bible?

Probably the most well-known verse in the Bible about sexual sin is Exodus 20:14 “you shall not commit adultery”. You may be interested to know that there was a printing (or misprinting) of the King James Bible in 1631 which featured a typo in this verse “thou shalt commit adultery”, as soon as this was discovered the offending Bibles were recalled and dubbed ‘the wicked Bible’.

Adultery in the Old Testament and the New is the sin of a married man or woman engaging in sexual behaviour with someone other than their spouse. In fact Jesus draws an even harder line in Matthew 5 where he says even to look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery in the heart.

The reason for this restriction is because God really values marriage. Sex is a good gift from God, and is to be enjoyed within a marriage relationship. The teaching of the Bible is that when taken out of bounds of a marriage relationship, sex is actually damaging not just for the 2 people involved, but for others around them as well.

In our sermon passage, Israel’s men committed sexual immorality with Moabite and Midianite women. They both sinned and it got even worse as the men then worshipped false gods. Sexual immorality is a broader concept than adultery and actually includes sexual activity outside of marriage (whether the participants are married to someone else or whether they are unmarried).

In the New Testament, sexual sin comes up fairly often. Jesus addresses it a number of times, Paul also had many words to say to the Corinthians on this issue, in 1 Corinthians 5 he addresses the shocking issue of a man who is sleeping with his mother-in-law, in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 he addresses the pastoral issue of the Corinthians sleeping with prostitutes, he also mentions that sexual sin is unique, every other sin is outside of your body, but sexual sin is against your own body.

There are many other places in the New Testament where sexual sin is addressed (Acts 15:20, Ephesians 5, 1 Thessalonians 4:4-8, Hebrews 13:4, Revelation 2:14-16, etc…) sometimes the warnings against it are very fierce. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:8 Paul says that anyone who wants to disagree about his teaching on sex is not rejecting Paul, they are rejecting God!

There are no doubt some sexual sins which are worse than others. For example- adultery is worse than pre-marital sex, because of the terrible breach of trust between husband and wife. Neverthelessless, any sexual activity outside of the environment God created it for (marriage) is seen by the Bible as sin.

## Sexual sin is forgivable.

Sometimes sexual sin is seen as unforgivable, or as the worst possible kind of sin. This is simply not true, the only sin that is unforgivable is the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection for us. (in other words the only thing that is unforgivable is refusing to accept God’s forgiveness)

1 John 1 reminds us that if we claim to be without sin, we are kidding ourselves! But if we confess our sins, God in his faithfulness will forgive us, and cleanse us. If you have been sinning sexually, Jesus calls you to turn from that, and ask for forgiveness and you will receive it. The antidote for sexual sin is the same as for any other sin, repent and believe (turn from sin, and trust in Jesus’ work on the cross in dying for your sins- and you will be forgiven!)

I believe that the Samaritan woman Jesus’ met in John 4, although she had sinned sexually in a big way, was completely forgiven by Jesus as she trusted in him. This is not a sin to be crushed by, it is (like all sin) a sin to bring before God, confess, turn away from, and receive God’s forgiveness for.

## The Problem we face

Every Christian needs to face up to the obvious fact that the gap between Biblical values on sex and marriage and the values of our culture is growing wider and wider. A lot has happened since Jesus ascended into heaven. Reliable contraception, the sexual revolution of the 60’s and 70’s, the almost universal normality of pre-marital sex, and the increasing norm of cohabitation before (and often instead of) marriage.

There are so many complex issues to understand socially, historically, etc… here. And I’m not an expert on them. One book you may find helpful is called ‘Pure Sex’ by Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, they explore the sexual revolution at depth and offer a Christian critique and alternative.

But I don’t intend to replicate that here I simply want to ask and answer a question.

“Do Christians and the Bible need to catch up with the times on this issue?”

Well, I guess it depends on what the Bible is. If the Bible is a collection of writings by human authors, or a book of myths, etc… then we may well need to get with the times.

But if the Bible is actually the Word of God, as it claims to be, then maybe the times need to get with the Bible! If God is actually the God who made us, and knows what is best for us, and is concerned for our welfare, and if Jesus really is Lord, then the Bible can’t be out of date on this issue.

That’s the real issue isn’t it? “Is God actually God?”, “Is Jesus actually Lord?” and “Are we willing to trust that our heavenly Father cares for us and knows what is best as we live in the world he has made?” Personally I am convinced that these things are true, and that the Bible’s teaching on sexuality (and our need for salvation in Jesus from every sin) is actually true and for our good. There are many other issues and questions that will arise out of this, but at its very heart the Godness of God, the Lordship of Christ and the authority of the Bible are in question.

## Living at the Crossroads

In reality the story of the Bible and the Christian worldview which arises from it stand in stark contrast to Western society’s story of self-understanding and worldview.

The Christian worldview describes human beings as basically sinful, evil and rebellious against our creator, but western civilization generally sees humans as basically good.

The Christian worldview sees human beings as in need of a Saviour while western society sees humans as in need of better education, opportunities, etc…

The Christian worldview describes humans as always sinful apart from God’s help, but western society sees humans as progressively improving as we make technological leaps and bounds.

Now there are undoubtedly great benefits arising from education and technology, but every human advance also shows fresh expressions of sin. Cyber bullying for example. We have achieved so much yet there is still greed, hatred, war, injustice and enormous suffering in our world. I submit to you that the Christian worldview is true, and the secular worldview (while having elements of truth in it) is ultimately false.

The divide between the Christian and secular view of sex is really a product of these underlying cultural assumptions, each of us needs to decide whether we will take God at his Word, or whether we will reject him on this matter.

## How to live at the crossroads

One interesting response to western secular sexuality is that of Westboro Baptist church. They have been known to picket celebrity funerals with signs such as “God hates fags”. Recently after Robyn William’s death they have announced that he is going to hell for being divorced twice.

The problem with Westboro Baptist church is that they haven’t paid proper attention to the Bible! For example if they were to read 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 they would see that Paul does command Christians to have nothing to do with those who are sexually immoral (or swindlers and drunkards as well!) But he is not talking about just anyone, he is talking about people who claim to be Christian yet live as if they are not. Paul explicitly says “what business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.”

Paraburdoo is full of people living in blatant sexual immorality. But if they have no personal commitment to Jesus Christ then that is entirely their business. Our role is to love and respect them. I have begun to form friendships with a number of people in town who have ‘partners’ instead of ‘spouses’. Now while I am convinced this is not best for them and there may be occasions where I would gently mention this to them, I will certainly not shout at them that they are going to hell for being defacto. You see, it is their business how they want to live and they will answer to God for their behaviour when they meet him. Our role is to pray for them and seek to share Jesus with them so that they can trust him for salvation.

I’d be delighted if marriage became more normal in our town, but sexual immorality isn’t Paraburdoo’s big problem. Paraburdoo’s biggest problem is that it is full of people who live lives that reject the Lord Jesus. They do not trust him as Saviour or acknowledge him as Lord despite all that he has done for them. Paraburdoo’s greatest need is salvation.

Christians do have a responsibility to be sexually pure and keep sex for marriage, to support one another’s marriages, to urge one another on to sexual purity, to rebuke each other when we fail in this area, and to point one another to the cross of Jesus as the means of our salvation and forgiveness for all our sins, sexual or otherwise. This is serious stuff, but thanks be to God that he has always been serious about salvation and has paid the price for our salvation in Jesus Christ.

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.* 1 Peter 3:18

1. The talk is available at http://www.sermoncloud.com/paratomprice/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)