

Towards a Biblical Theology of Marriage and a Note on its Implications for those called to Accredited Ministry with Baptists Together

While it is true that the Bible contains references to many different forms of marriage, the New Testament advocates only one. In particular, when he is asked about divorce, Jesus¹ answers with a question about the Law but then goes on to teach about marriage on the basis of how things were at the beginning.² He refers explicitly to the creation of humanity as male and female and to the story of Adam and Eve and cites the passage about a man leaving his parents and clinging to his wife with whom he becomes 'one flesh'.³ In other words, long before the giving of the Law and before any act of primal human disobedience, the unity of a man and a woman in a relationship that Jesus understands as marriage, was a part of God's purposes in creation.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, an apostle makes use of one of these passages in his teaching on sexual misconduct, strongly implying that in his view sexual activity belongs within heterosexual marriage. He argues that the Christian's body is not their own to do with as he or she may please but belongs to God and is to be used for his glory.⁴ Elsewhere, in discussing the mutual responsibilities involved in marriage, and again relying on Genesis 2.24, the letter to the Ephesians makes a link between Christians being members of Christ's body and the way that a man and a woman belong to one another in marriage.⁵

At the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, when the prophecy turns to visions of re-creation, one of the images used is that of a marriage supper.⁶ One of the pictures for the union of God with his peoples, for the joining of heaven and earth, the great reconciliation of primal difference, is the union of a man and a woman in marriage.⁷

The New Testament's theology of sex and marriage is undergirded by the writers' understanding of Genesis 1 – 2. They see the distinction between male and female as something primal and woven into the fabric of creation. The primal human, the Adam of Genesis 2, is divided so that male and female can both exist⁸ and so that their union can be a sign of God's presence in creation and his purposes for it. The use of this idea in Ephesians demonstrates that this union of difference is a picture of Christ's unity with his church. The use of marriage as an illustration in Revelation indicates that it functions as a picture of God's ultimate desire to be united with his peoples.

In other words, heterosexual marriage, the union of persons whose difference is primal, is a good within creation, is a sign of the salvation that God offers in Christ and is a picture of

¹ It may be worth noting that the BUGB Declaration of Principle refers to the 'absolute authority' of Jesus Christ...as revealed in the Scripture and refers to him as 'God manifest in the flesh'. Any Baptist accepting the declaration must surely accept that this explicit teaching may not be overturned or explained away.

² Mark 10.2 – 9 and parallel.

³ Genesis 1.27 and 2.24.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 6.16 – 20.

⁵ Ephesians 5.28 – 33.

⁶ Revelation 19.7 – 9.

⁷ Revelation 21.2 – 4.

⁸ Genesis 2.21 – 22.

the time when heaven and earth are one. It speaks of creation, salvation, and new creation. The difference between those involved is fundamental to the purpose.

One implication of this must be that whatever value there might or might not be in covenanted same-sex relationships, they cannot carry the same theological meaning as heterosexual marriage. They are not the same thing, and they should not be called by the same name by the church, even if the state chooses to do so. A second implication is surely that God has offered us two ways to be human adults. We can be single, or we can be married to a person of the opposite sex.

Those called to ministry among us are called to be exemplary disciples. They recognize that God's calling on their lives is the thing that defines their being and their purpose. All other parts of their being are secondary and are subject to their identity in Christ. If they are to reflect God and his purposes for creation, not just in what they do but in who they are, they will either be single or will be a partner in a heterosexual marriage. It is therefore appropriate for the BU ministerial guidelines to regard sexual relationships between people of the same sex, and indeed all sexual relationships other than heterosexual marriage, as conduct unbecoming of those called to be ministers and to therefore constitute gross misconduct for the purposes of the ministerial guidelines.

Stephen Finamore
May 2022