



The Good Designer

BEARING GOD'S IMAGE IN MARRIAGE, SEX AND GENDER

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Photo by Alysa Bajenaru



Introduction

Introduction

Japanese culture does not have a history of hostility towards same-sex marriage, homosexuality or sexual freedom. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is banned in the Japanese capital. Tokyo Rainbow Pride is a parade that has been held annually since 2012, with attendance increasing every year. Various opinion polls have found high levels of support for same-sex marriage amongst the younger generation in Japan. However, a 2020 survey of more than 10,000 LGBT people within Japan found that 38 percent had been harassed or assaulted.

As Christians, we know God has a viewpoint concerning these things. But too often we, the church, judge from a distance without knowing how to come alongside.

- *How do we make sense of marriage, sex and gender within Japanese culture?*
- *Should we simply embrace what is widely accepted?*

Here are three reasons why this topic is important:

1. **We are a church family, and within our family there are people wrestling with these issues.** In order to be good brothers and sisters to them, we need to know how scripture leads believers to view such matters.
2. **We are an outward facing church with a heart for our city.** We are more than an inward looking church, looking only after our own people. We want to be a winsome witness to those around us.
3. **We can learn from believers who wrestle with these issues.** These individuals often help us grasp what it really means to be a true disciple of Jesus. Studying this topic helps each of us better understand what it means to be *'saved by grace'* and to *'follow Jesus'*.



Marriage and Sex: Creation and Restoration

Marriage and Sex: Creation and Restoration

Scripture Text

Genesis 2:22-24

Ephesians 5:23-32

Revelation 21:1-4

Big Idea

Marriage and sex can only be correctly understood by understanding God's intent for them, and how they are affected by the four main chapters of the bible. Marriage is given by God as a *'living witness'* to the eternal marriage relationship he enters into with his chosen people.

Overview

Marriage can only be understood rightly by understanding it through the four main chapters of the bible (creation, fall, redemption and restoration). Marriage is the overarching storyline of the bible.

The first few chapters of the bible begin with sets of complementary pairs coming together, such as

- *heaven and earth*
- *sea and dry land*
- *male and female*

This coming together of different, but complementary pairs, points to eternity—*where our relationship with Jesus will be restored and we will be joined forever*. Like the first few chapters of the bible, the last few chapters also end with sets of complementary pairs coming together, such as

- *Jesus and his bride*.
- *the new heavens and the new earth*

Observation and Meaning

Male and female are two different genders which fit together perfectly. They are an important part of God's design. Man and woman are made in God's image and reflect his image through:

- *their unity and diversity*
- *the way they love one another*
- *marriage*

Man, by himself, reflects God's image. Woman, by herself, reflects God's image. Male and female, together, reflect God's image.

1. How does the diversity and unity, between men and women, image God and the trinity (Genesis 1:27)?
2. In the Old Testament, we are told that Eve was taken from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21-22). In the New Testament, we are told the church is part of Christ's body (Ephesians 5:29-30). What is the connection between this first marriage, and the eternal marriage between Jesus and the church?
3. According to Paul, what does earthly marriage point to (Ephesians 5:31-32)?
4. How does the second from last chapter of the bible depict eternity (Revelation 21:1-3)? In what way does this elevate the importance, holiness and significance of marriage?

Application

- What are some of the ways you have thought incorrectly about marriage?
- We image God by displaying his self-giving love (1 John 4:7, Matthew 22:37). Can you share an example of how you have experienced relational fulfilment by serving someone else?
- We are all called to walk in love with one another, but some are also called to marriage (an earthly picture of an eternal reality). Without naming specific people, what have you learnt about Jesus' devotion to his bride from observing married couples within the church?

The marriage covenant was intended to reflect the love of Jesus, and his relationship with His church: “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31).





Marriage and Sex: Fall and Redemption

Marriage and Sex: Fall and Redemption

Scripture Text

Genesis 2:22-24

Ephesians 5:23-32

Revelation 21:1-4

Big Idea

Marriage and sex can only be correctly understood by understanding God's intent for them, and how they are affected by the four main chapters of the bible. Sex is a signpost pointing to the true intimacy we are to enjoy with God.

Overview

Sex can only be understood rightly by understanding it through the four main chapters of the bible (creation, fall, redemption and restoration).

The fall distorted reality and left us to pursue sex as an ultimate form of love and intimacy. But the bible views sex as a signpost which points to true intimacy, to the relationship we are to enjoy with God. Redemption displays Jesus' love and devotion towards his bride. He pursues her, dies for her, and rises to new life in order to spend eternity with her. It is this act which restores us to God, and enables us to walk in holiness before him.

As we lay down our lives for one another, we find life. As we serve one another, we find ourselves relationally fulfilled.

Observation and Meaning

In Genesis, chapter three, Adam and Eve sin against God and sin enters the world. Sin distorts the way we view things.

One of these distortions is the idea that sexual intimacy outside of marriage doesn't harm us. Here are three biblical reasons why God rejects sex outside of marriage:

- *it inhibits the intimacy and fulfilment we seek*
- *it ends up using and harming all involved*
- *it misrepresents Jesus Christ*

**Jesus Christ was the most fulfilled
person to walk on earth, but he
never married or had sex on earth**

1. In general, how does sin distort the way we view things (see Matthew 15:18-20)? In particular, how does sin distort our understanding of sex and the fulfilment it is supposed to bring?
2. Intimacy is a central theme in the bible. How does this explain the desire many people have for romantic love?
3. How does the biblical image of the bridegroom and his bride, help people to live without romantic love? How does this image help people not to idolise romantic love?
4. The Bible tells us the punishment for sexual distortion is death (Leviticus 20:10-16). What does this tell us about how God views the harm we do to ourselves when we move outside of his boundaries?

Application

- Women are sometimes judged on how sexually appealing they are. Men are sometimes judged on how many sexual encounters they have experienced. How have you suffered as a result of this distortion?
- How have you been tempted to tie your personal sense of worth to a romantic relationship? In what ways do you over or under value the gift of sex?
- What changes to your thinking, desires or lifestyle is God calling you to embrace as a result of thinking about this topic in a biblical way?

Our ultimate hope does not rest on being married. Our ultimate hope does not rest on having a perfect marriage. Our ultimate hope is in Jesus Christ.

There may be some who feel discouraged about how they have lived in the past. They may be experiencing shame, as a result of their past sexual experiences. It is important to remember, Jesus made us his bride by laying his life down for us. Jesus did not come for a spotless bride. Jesus came to make us a spotless bride. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, he washes us clean and makes us new.

Photo by Gaelle Marcel



Same Sex Attraction: The Word Doubted

Same Sex Attraction: The Word Doubted

Scripture Text

Genesis 1-3

John 9:1-2

Romans 1:18-28

Big Idea

God speaks His good Word to every human being in order to redefine, redeem and redirect our lives for His glory.

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of this Word.

Overview

In order to approach the topic of sexual orientation wisely, we first need to address the issue of identity.

Firstly, **God's Word both creates and defines us.** This helps us to realise how dependent we are on God's Word for understanding about ourselves.

Secondly, **when God's word is doubted it ushers in confusion about our identity.** This confusion includes a tendency amongst people to idolise sex, and a distortion in various different aspects of our humanity (one of which can be sexual orientation).

The combination of these two truths, should stir compassion within us for those wrestling with same sex attraction (as well as understanding that this is not in accordance with God's original design).

**Christians should be especially
compassionate, because we,
more than most people,
understand everyone is wrestling
with the consequences of the fall
in some way.**

Observation and Meaning

When God's Word is doubted:

- *it affects our sense of identity*
- *it leaves us to idolise sex*
- *it affects our humanity (including our desires)*

After rejecting God's Word, and with the absence of any scientific basis for understanding feelings, the world concludes: *"There are all kinds of different attractions; some heterosexual, some bisexual and some homosexual. All three are natural attractions, and your feelings determine which category you fit into. Fulfilment is the result of being true to whatever feels right to you."*

Secular counsellors encourage patients to look in on themselves in order to discover who they are and what they should do

1. Regarding identity, what is significant about the fact that it is God's Word that creates us and speaks blessing over us (see Genesis 1:1-31; Hebrews 1:3a)? How does mankind respond incorrectly to God's Word (see Genesis 3:1-6)? What impact did the fall have on mankind regarding the security we now experience in our identity (see Genesis 3:7-10)? What impact did the fall have on mankind regarding our desires in general (James 4:1-3)?
2. How does Romans 1:18-27 show that no longer worshipping God (and instead worshipping created things) affects all of life, including sexual desire?
3. How does John 9:1-3 remind us that not everything we experience (in our bodies and psychological makeup) is a direct result of our personal sin or bad choices? How does this shape our response towards those who suffer in different ways?
4. How does God's Word, rather than feelings, provide a more certain foundation for our identity?

Application

- What desires do you have that you recognise are not part of God's created intent (see James 4:1-3)?
- What are you tempted to put your identity in? What does Jesus' work tell you about the true you that you are becoming?
- What does it look like for you to live in step with who God is making you to be?

God speaks over his creation and declares it to be good. God gives his affirmation and blessing to all he has created. Therefore, our sense of identity comes through God speaking to us and disclosing himself to us.

There may be people wondering if their same sex attraction puts them outside of God's love. If this is you, we want to tell you God does love you and you are welcome in his church.

The background of the image shows two open books with aged, yellowish pages. A person's hand is visible in the center, holding a pen or pencil, suggesting they are reading or writing. The lighting is soft, and the overall tone is muted and scholarly.

Same Sex Attraction: The Word Believed

The Word Believed

Scripture Text

Genesis 1-3

Ephesians 1:4-8, 2:1-5, 4:1

2 Corinthians 5:17

Big Idea

God speaks His good Word to every human being in order to redefine, redeem and redirect our lives for His glory. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of this Word.

Overview

When talking with some people, it is apparent their experience of same sex attraction is core to their identity. To the point that they no longer say, “*I struggle with same sex attraction.*” Instead, they say, “*I am gay and this is central to who I am.*”

In order to approach the topic of sexual orientation wisely, we first need to address the issue of identity.

Firstly, **God’s Word both creates and defines us.**

Secondly, **when God’s word is doubted it ushers in confusion about our identity.**

Thirdly, **God’s Word comes to redefine our identity.** It redefines us by telling us who we are in creation. It redeems us, as the Word of God incarnate lays His life down for us. It redirects us to live according to His word.

Those wrestling with any form of sexual struggle, should define themselves as Jesus defines them and follow Jesus wholeheartedly (by living a life of faith and repentance).

As a church, we are to be a refuge to those wrestling with same sex attraction. We achieve this by demonstrating compassion, by pointing people to Jesus, and by being a rich relational community (by coming alongside people as they seek to walk in faithfulness to God).

Observation and Meaning

1. How does Ephesians 2:1-4 give us a more authentic view of our identity? How does Ephesians 2:5 show us the redemption that we have in Jesus Christ? How does Ephesians 2:10, 4:1, 4:23 urge us to live in the light of this new identity?
2. In what way is same sex attraction similar to the struggles all Christians face? In what way is same sex attraction different from other types of struggles? How should this inform our care for those amongst us who are wrestling with same sex attraction?

From the sermon:

3. What should those wrestling with same sex attraction do? How should the church support those struggling in these ways? How should we engage with culture on these matters?

Application

In reference to her coming to faith, Rosaria Butterfield said: *“I did not perceive it as an automatic blessing. In some ways, my conversion came into my life like a train wreck.”*¹ When asked, ‘How were you converted out of homosexuality?’ Rosaria replied: *“I wasn’t. I was converted out of unbelief. There’s no conversion from gay to straight. The conversion that is relevant in the bible is from a heart that was at enmity with God to a heart that is at peace with God.”*² When asked about how the Lord had healed her, Rosaria explained, *“The way that he always heals. The Word of God got to be bigger inside of me than myself.”*

- What changes to your thinking, desires or lifestyle is God calling you to embrace as a result of thinking about this topic in a biblical way?
- How can you serve all who are unmarried in our church, by helping to create a rich relational community for them to be part of?

¹ My Train Wreck Conversion | Rosaria Butterfield | February 7, 2013 | <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/my-train-wreck-conversion.html>

² How were you converted out of homosexuality? | Rosaria Butterfield | <https://rosariabutterfield.com/new-blog/2018/2/14/how-were-you-converted-out-of-homosexuality>



“When the Lord entered my world, I experienced that gospel-ignited “expulsive power of a new affection” (to quote the title of Thomas Chalmers’s famous sermon). That new affection was not heterosexuality, but Jesus, my Jesus, my friend and Saviour. I was not converted out of homosexuality.”

— Rosaria Butterfield



**Gender:
Image Bearers**

Gender: Image Bearers

Scripture Text

Matthew 19:1-12

John 9:1-3

Big Idea

In this broken world we both affirm the binary nature of gender, as well as the complex ways this is sometimes distorted. We point all people to Jesus, who suffered our shame on the cross so that all who trust in him can enter his Kingdom.

Overview

biological sex: *the biological fact of someone's gender, which is determined by their DNA (chromosomes xx or xy).*

gender: *is understood to be the characteristics that a society associates with being masculine or feminine.*

gender identity: *a person's internal sense of their own gender.*

God creates mankind as male and female beings. This is affirmed by God as being good (Genesis 1), and affirmed by Jesus as being normative (Matthew 19). Therefore, according to God's good design, gender is binary. Despite this, when he speaks of 'eunuchs who have been so from birth' (Matthew 19:12), Jesus implies the fall has brought about variations regarding how gender is received and experienced. These variations include

intersex conditions: *when a person has the biological attributes of both sexes, or biological attributes which do not fit societies assumptions regarding what constitutes male or female.*

gender dysphoria: *when a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity.*

Christians are to exercise great compassion, seeking to love and understand people in their suffering. Those with *intersex conditions* face difficult choices that can only be processed on a case by case basis. Those with *gender dysphoria*, though also complex and requiring guidance, should not seek to change the biological sex God has given them.

**One of the most painful
experiences, for all of us,
is when someone judges us
without really knowing us.**

Observation and Meaning

1. In Matthew 19:4, what part of scripture is Jesus referring to when speaking about gender? What is Jesus wanting us to believe about gender from this part of scripture?
2. In Matthew 19:12, Jesus refers to three types of eunuchs. What are these three types? How does the category of 'eunuchs who have been so from birth' fit together with what Jesus says about the binary nature of gender (Matthew 19:4)?
3. What reasons does the bible give for things in this world not reflecting the original intent God had for them in creation? Are these deviations from God's original intent the direct consequence of an individual's personal sin (John 9:1-3)?

Application

- What are your earliest memories of hearing people talk about transgender issues and sex changes?
- As believers, we affirm the distinction and clarity between genders—but we are not saying a biblical man must have a beard, drink beer and play rugby. It is important to understand that gender stereotypes look different in different cultures. What are some of the typical gender stereotypes in your culture? How do these stereotypes differ from the bible's perspective? How have these stereotypes affected you?
- Think about an experience of suffering that you have either personally experienced or witnessed. How does suffering make you compassionate towards others who suffer?

Instead of teaching God is so holy he cannot dwell in our bodies, the bible says our bodies, as believers, are so divinely dwelt by God they cannot be used for sin.

A photograph showing several hands of different skin tones stacked together in a circle, symbolizing unity, community, and support. The hands are positioned in a way that they form a central point, with fingers overlapping. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. The text 'Gender: Community Sharers' is overlaid in white, bold font on the lower left side of the image.

Gender: Community Sharers

Gender: Community Sharers

Scripture Text

Acts 8:26-40

Isaiah 56:3-8

Big Idea

In this broken world we both affirm the binary nature of gender, as well as the complex ways this is sometimes distorted. We point all people to Jesus, who suffered our shame on the cross so that all who trust in him can enter his Kingdom.

Overview

Although Christians show grace and kindness to sufferers of gender disorders, they must refute those who seek to eradicate the binary nature of gender (allowing people to determine their own identity).

In the bible, there is nothing preventing those who put their faith in Jesus Christ from being added to the body. As believers, we should actively seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ—who suffered humiliation and judgment in order that we could be brought into the flock. Isaiah goes on to say that there is place for eunuchs who trust God and hold fast to his covenant (Isaiah 56:3-8). If eunuchs will be in heaven, we must also welcome them into our midst, and point them to the one who can redeem their lives and lead them to glory.

There is a theme throughout this series, and that is the need for *compassion* and *clarity*. Here are some practical steps to be aware of when engaging with people who wrestle with gender related issues:

- *listen empathetically and discerningly*
- *express genuine love for the person*
- *be clear about what sin is and what sin is not*
- *be clear about what faith looks like*

Observation and Meaning

1. What should a Christian's first response be to someone suffering from any gender disorder?
2. What is the difference between intersex and gender dysphoria? What is similar regarding how you would respond to someone with these two conditions? What is different regarding how you would respond to someone with these two conditions?
3. In Acts 8:26-39, Philip comes upon a eunuch who puts his faith in Jesus. What passage is the eunuch reading from? How does this passage help those suffering to know Jesus has carried their grief and shame?
4. Having put his faith in Jesus, nothing prevents the eunuch from being baptised (Acts 8:36-38). According to the prophet Isaiah, what is the inheritance of eunuchs who give themselves to God (Isaiah 56:3-8)?

Application

- How can you clearly and winsomely show that it is neither right or logical to allow people to define themselves in any way they choose?
- How would you patiently, but clearly, answer a 52 year old Caucasian man who told you he was in fact a 17 year old Asian woman?
- How is God calling you to serve those wrestling with gender related issues, by helping to create a rich relational community within our church for them to be part of?

**If you have been plunged into Jesus Christ,
you have been welcomed into his body.**

Therefore, as members of the body of Christ, we are family.

We are called to love and walk alongside one another.

We are called to pick one another up when we fall down.

We are called to point one another to our Lord and Saviour.

We are called to walk together towards our coming glory.

<https://www.gracecity.jp>

