

Biblical Sexual Ethics: A Survey and Starting Points

By Steven Schweitzer

1. In his opening paragraph, Steve Schweitzer says,

The church has often tried to identify *the* biblical view of a particular topic, but rarely do our scriptures speak with a single voice. Instead, the Bible contains multiple voices—an ensemble or chorus—sometimes producing harmony and sometimes discordant reverberations. Sexuality in the Bible and what we strive to classify as “biblical sexual ethics” are no exception.

Look at some Bible stories that put sexual behavior in a positive light, such as Genesis 1 and 2, Ruth, and Song of Solomon. In these cases, what is positive about human sexuality? Then look at stories in which sexuality is negative, such as Judges 19, 2 Samuel 11-12, and Romans 1:24-32. What is good about human sexuality and what is bad about it?

2. Schweitzer says, “This point bears repeating, given the long history of Christian condemnation of sexuality and the general embarrassment about it: sexuality is not sinful; sexuality is not condemned; sexuality is not the problem.” If sexuality is not the problem, what is the problem?

3. The Song of Songs does not restrict lovemaking to procreation. Nor does it restrict sex to intercourse. For what reasons, other than procreation, are we sexual beings?

4. According to Schweitzer, Jesus does not say very much about issues of sexuality: “Jesus seems to affirm marriage and celibacy (though not without some ambiguity), while condemning divorce, adultery, and lust. But beyond this, we find no extensive treatment of sexuality in the teachings of Jesus.” What do these few details suggest about Jesus’ view of sexuality?

5. “If we have any hope of understanding Paul’s controversial statements on sexuality (whether heterosexual or homosexual), we must understand him in his ancient cultural context.” What were the attitudes about marriage, divorce, homosexuality (of some type), and lust in ancient Jewish and Greek culture?