

Ouachita Baptist University

## Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

---

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

---

4-20-2021

### Sexual Ethics from a Biblical Perspective

Braylon Pilant

*Ouachita Baptist University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Pilant, Braylon, "Sexual Ethics from a Biblical Perspective" (2021). *Honors Theses*. 797.  
[https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses/797](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/797)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact [mortensona@obu.edu](mailto:mortensona@obu.edu).

*“Sexual Ethics from a Biblical Perspective”*

An Honors Thesis Paper on  
*Prostitutes and Polygamists* by David T. Lamb and Romans 1:26-27

By  
Braylon Pilant

Carl Goodson Honors Program  
Ouachita Baptist University  
2020-2021

## **Introduction**

This honors thesis paper is over the ethics of sexual conduct from a Biblical perspective. This paper aims to be theological, as it will examine God's view, creation, and design of sex; anthropological, as it will view the human role in sexual conduct and ethics from a Biblical perspective; and Christological, as it will examine how Christ redeems the breaching of said ethics. With this goal in mind, the research for this paper will be twofold.

First, there will be an examination of sexual ethics through a Biblical, and particularly Old Testament, lens. This will be done through a reading and review of *Prostitutes and Polygamists* by David T. Lamb. This will help give an overview of how sex is dealt with in the Bible. Specifically, the design, purpose, and Biblical examples of sexual sin will be discussed.

Second, there will be an exegesis of Romans 1:26-27, in which Paul discusses sexual matter. This case study will be to give a specific example of Paul's thought on sexual ethics and an insight to how sex is viewed from a New Testament perspective. Both of these components of this paper are in place with the goal to give the reader an overview of sexual ethics from a Biblical perspective.

### ***Prostitutes and Polygamists* by David T. Lamb**

In this first section, there will be a review and discussion over the themes brought forth by the book *Prostitutes and Polygamists* by David T. Lamb. This book reviews "the good, bad and ugly" of stories involving sex in the Old Testament with the purpose of providing an overview of the overarching themes of Biblical sexual ethics. Lamb himself received a DPhil from the University of Oxford, and currently teaches at Biblical Theological Seminary where he primarily focuses on Old Testament studies. The book is broken up into seven chapters: an

introductory chapter, husbands and wives, polygamists, prostitutes, rapists and adulterers, incesters, and homosexuals and sodomites, as well as an epilogue at the end. From here, we can tell that Lamb has decided to break up his discussion in large by the various categories of sexual sin as portrayed in the Old Testament. In this section, there will be a discussion over each chapter individually, followed by some concluding thoughts.

### **Humans Behaving Badly (Introduction)**

In this introductory chapter, Lamb shows the need for this book as a whole. In the Church today, we far too often ignore questions of sex and sexuality, especially as it pertains in the Bible. We often do not preach controversial and even gruesome passages of Scripture that dive into these discussions. However, the Church's approach to talking about the harder topics surrounding sex is not consistent with two things: culture and the Bible. What the Church tends to shy away from, our culture does not. Our contemporary culture is not afraid to press questions of sex and sexuality, and the Church needs to be equipped and ready to engage in such discussions. Another reason is that the Bible does not shy away from such discussions as well. The Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is full of stories and examples of sexual sin. These passages of Scripture are not to be ignored, but should be dealt with, studied, and applied to the life of the Church. Another reason Lamb gives for the writing of this book is the fact that looking at these stories give us insight into God's response towards these situations. We miss the gracious nature of God in a big way if we ignore the more apparent stories of humans behaving badly.

### **Husbands and Wives**

Lamb starts off his main discourse by showing what sex should really look like under God's design. This design starts in the beginning of creation, when God creates human beings as

“male and female.” This pairing is significant, because these words point back to human beings being made in the image of God. There is both singular and plural pronouns for God in the creation narrative, revealing that God is both individual and corporate at the same time. Like God, humans are also individual and corporate, as male and female make up a unified man. Another way that humans are made in the image of God based on the creation narrative is that humans are commanded to create other humans, just as God has created them. This is done through sex, and is the first thing that God commands humans to do. When Eve is created from Adam, he cries out a love poem “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” This shows that Adam realizes the role that women and men play in each other’s lives in marriage: they are perfectly designed to help and be a companion for each other in a godly way. There is nothing on earth that can provide life to a husband like his wife can, and vice versa. They are connected as bone of bone and flesh of flesh. From all of this, we can see a clear ideal Biblical standard for marriage: one man and one woman together forever.

However, this first marriage takes a tragic turn and an act of disobedience causes disharmony and disunity between man and God and man with each other. In fact, all sexual problems and consequences, both in the Bible and today, can be traced back to this initial act of obedience. There are three initial things that are fractured within marriage right at the moment of the first act of disobedience. First, the woman and man become ashamed of their naked flesh around each other. No longer are they completely vulnerable, but they try to hide themselves from one another. Another issue is that the command to fill the earth by children making becomes a painful process. Childbearing becomes painful as a consequence of this initial act of disobedience. Lastly, instead of being equal partners in marriage, husbands will desire to rule

over their wives, resulting in all sorts of consequences. It is these fracturing's of the institution of marriage that plays out in the broken stories of sexual sin all over the Old Testament.

## **Polygamists**

The first type of broken sexual relationship shown in the Bible is polygamy. This may not seem like a big deal in our culture, but Lamb argues it is worth studying for three reasons. First, our culture is finding this topic more and more pressing, as shown by TV shows based around polygamy popping up in bunches over the past decade. Second, while it may not be a big issue in American culture, it is in other parts of the world. In fact, the Church has undermined its missionary efforts in Africa largely due to our misunderstanding of polygamy. Third, the Bible does mention polygamy more times than once, so it is not a topic to be ignored. In fact, there are twenty-nine examples of polygamy throughout the Old Testament. One of the best ways to get a proper view on the Bible's stance on polygamy is to view laws that address the issue. Since laws are meant to be read prescriptively, we know from them that this is what ought to be the norm to the original audience. It is also worth pointing out that these laws were written to situations where polygamy was to be expected, based on the culture they were written in.

The first of these laws is addressed towards those who have slaves as concubines, or second wives. The law, which is written in Exodus 21:7-11, lists out beneficial rights to the concubine. It states that she cannot be resold as a slave, she cannot be the wife to both a father and a son, and she must be supported by basic necessities. The second of these laws is addresses men from taking two sisters as wives. The law, which is written in Leviticus 18:18, was designed to prohibit family tension caused by multiple sisters marrying the same man. The third law, Deuteronomy 17:17, limits the number of wives a royal king can take. This was to protect the spiritual condition of those who could have realistically taken many women to be their wives.

The fourth law, Deuteronomy 21:10-14, addresses soldiers who take wives from rival nations they have defeated in battle. This law protects these particular women in that they had a time of grieving, they could not be a slave, and their status was protected if they were let go. In fact, Lamb points out that the way Israel was instructed to treat foreign woman was far better than other nations in the Ancient Near East. The fifth law, Deuteronomy 25:5-6, addresses widows when their husband dies and they have no children. The law says for the deceased man's brother to join with the widow in having a child, so that the widow has protection and security in the form of the next generation. In summary, all of these laws are designed to make the best out of unideal situations. They are for promoting spiritual welfare, reducing family tension, increasing honor, reducing shame, and providing security for the vulnerable. These laws were given by God, the creator of ideal marriage, to Moses with the intent of protecting those who are in unideal marital situations. These laws give us a glimpse of the love and grace of God to those in broken places.

### **Prostitutes**

It is clear to see that prostitution is outside the bounds of God's design for sex and marriage, as can be read in Mosaic law and inferred from Biblical themes of sex and marriage. However, prostitution is a profession that needs to be understood with clear eyes instead of blind judgement. Few to no girls have ever grown up wanting to be a prostitute. It is usually the result of a longtime exposure of poverty, addiction, abuse, and oppression. Also, it is not just a female issue, as many males are also prostitutes as seen in the Bible and today. However, prostitution is something that deteriorates the individual, the family, and the community.

Lamb first discusses the stories of Abraham and Sarah and their ventures to foreign lands, in which Abraham exploits his wife Sarah to protect himself. In these situations, God protects

Sarah and reveals to these foreign kings that she is a married woman. In this, we can see that God cares about the protection of women in similar situations, something that Abraham failed to do. Throughout the Old Testament, there are stories of women who prostitute themselves for righteous reasons. An example of this would be Tamar. In fact, in these stories, it is the men involved that are seen in the more negative light. The men are usually quick to judge but slow to see their own sin in the correct light. Even as Jesus is having his feet kissed by the prostitute, Simon and the other elders are judging what is going on. Jesus rebukes them, and forgives the prostitute. This shows that Jesus seeks to honor those who are marginalized, and will forgive anybody, even prostitutes, who seek him. Again, God uses non-ideal situations to teach messages of faith, hope, and love.

### **Rapists and Adulterers**

In today's world, cases of rape are at staggering highs, especially among college campuses. However, they are often difficult to determine based on the private nature of the crime, leading to different stories from both parties. The distinction between forced and consensual sex is difficult to determine today, as it was during the Biblical times. Interestingly enough, rape often gets grouped together with adultery throughout the Old Testament, which is Lamb's justification for grouping them together in this chapter. Adultery, which is sex between a man and a woman who are not married, and at least one of the parties is married, is clearly prohibited in the Bible. In fact, commandment number seven in the Ten Commandments is "You shall not commit adultery." It is even said in Leviticus 20:10 that adulterers will surely be put to death. It seems that capital punishment is too hard of a punishment for this crime, but it is revealing the seriousness of going against God's design for sex and marriage. There are two specific laws regarding adultery, set up in hypothetical form. In both instances, both the man and



the woman get the same punishment: death by stoning. There are also two laws regarding rape, also set up in hypothetical form. However, these two laws are very different from even each other. The first one, Deuteronomy 22:25-27, is about a man who violently seizes an engaged woman and rapes her. In this scenario, the man is to be put to death, but the woman is to not be punished in any way. The second one, Deuteronomy 22:28-29, is about a man who tries to seduce an unmarried woman, fails, then tries to rape her only to be caught in the act. For this crime, the man has to pay a fine to the woman's family and marry the woman without any option of divorce. While this may seem strange, marrying was a far better option for the woman who was victimized than non-marrying, since marrying the man offered her lifetime protection while not marrying the man would have most likely left her unmarried forever due to her victim status, resulting in poverty and possibly prostitution. While these laws are all different in nature, they all have the interest of punishing the perpetrators, protecting the victims, and holding God's standards for sex and marriage. Far too often, our culture today in and outside of the Church tends to protect the abusers, not the victims of rape. This is done in the interest of saving the reputation of the individual involved, or the entire organization. However, the Bible is not slow to call out perpetrators of rape, no matter the status of the individual. David, for example, is believed to have raped Bathsheba while he was King of Israel. However, God treats David the way he would treat any rapist, no matter their background or social standing.

### **Incestors**

Incest is a particularly bizarre sexual encounter that needs to be addressed. Fortunately, the Old Testament does this the way it addresses other sexual sins, by legislating laws against it and documenting its consequences. The laws against it come in Leviticus 18:6-18, which is a table of all forms of incest that are strictly forbidden. However, there are many examples of

prominent Old Testament figures who were involved in incest. Many of these examples though are in Genesis, before these laws are established. Also, there was not a lot of marital options available, since there were few worshippers of Yahweh and it was preferable to marry someone with shared values and customs even if that meant going inside of the family tree. One of the most famous stories of incest in the Bible occurs in the narrative of John the Baptist's beheading. He is killed because he speaks against Herod's affection for younger women he is related to. This passage in Mark is surrounded by two passages of Jesus having compassion and mercy for a woman. This communicates that while worldly leaders may use their power to exploit the vulnerable, Jesus cares deeply for those and has their best interest in mind.

### **Homosexuals and Sodomites**

Lamb concedes that homosexuality is particularly difficult to discuss, because of both our current political climate and the fact that there are zero instances of homosexuality or homosexual acts in the Old Testament. However, there are two Levitical laws that condemn having sex with the same gender, as consistent with the rest of the sexual vices discussed. Because this is all that is mentioned in the Old Testament, Lamb leaves the topic of homosexuality at that and instead covers the story of Sodom, which many have (wrongly) linked with homosexuality. Another misconception about Sodom is that the story is one of divine wrath. Actually, the story more prominently features God's love on Sodom. For starters, the people of Sodom committed great sins, by which would have earned instant judgment if it was to be consistent with similar situations during the time immediately following Noah. However, the city is not destroyed, as God shows extreme and divine patience. Not only this, but God also delivers Sodom from battle in Genesis 14, freeing them from oppression by their enemies. Not only God, but Abraham also loved Sodom, as he risked his life to intercede on behalf of them. This attitude

Abraham has towards a city of great sin should be what marks the Church today. We should not be a people who hate those who sin, but love them instead and have their best interest in mind, which is for them to receive mercy from God. Next, we see that there are in fact not a single righteous man in Sodom, as every single man comes to Lot's house in a mob to get hold of his two visitors. This shows that this city is in fact deserving of destruction and will get wiped out by God. However, God does not inflict wrath without showing another act of grace, as he attempts to send messages of warning to the residents of Sodom that destruction is coming.

There is no clear evidence that Sodom gets destroyed because of homosexuality, but there is evidence that Sodom committed great acts of inhospitality and injustice. The inhospitality is seen when the visitors come to Sodom and the men of the city try to take advantage of them, instead of welcoming them in. In fact, Jesus compares people's lack of hospitality to the judgment of Sodom during his ministry. The injustice is seen throughout the narrative as there is an outcry to Yahweh because of Sodom. This outcry is similar to Israel's outcry as they are being oppressed and enslaved by Egypt. Although we do not know how Sodom was carrying acts of oppression and injustice, we do know that they were occurring and that God stopped them from doing it any longer. This is potentially a tough pill to swallow for the Church, if we are too focused on the sins of others and not our own. Sodom was a city that had excess, but was not hospitable to those who needed it the most. May we not see the story of Sodom as an excuse to marginalize those in the LGBT community but instead use it to be hospitable and show the compassion and the love of God to them.

## **Epilogue**

As Lamb stated at the beginning of the book, sex and marriage are ultimately a gift from God. We should keep them in that place, and avoid worshipping the gift instead of the giver. The

Bible, though frequently mentioning stories of flawed and unideal sexual relationships, is ultimately about divine love. These stories highlight the fact that God can forgive sexually flawed people and work through sexually broken situations. This is why we cannot ignore these stories today. They uniquely reveal the relationship between sinful humans and a merciful God. As important as marriage may seem, it is not as important as our Spiritual marriage with Christ. Jesus is surprisingly silent on the topic of marriage, and both he and Paul, the two most important figures in the New Testament, both live their lives single. Perhaps the most important aspect of the creation narrative is that it points us to the ultimate marriage, the one between Christ and his Church. It is in this marriage that, once again, we will be completely unified to Christ as his bone and flesh becomes our bone and flesh, and we will be living in perfect harmony once again.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear to see throughout the book that Lamb's primary focus is not to show why the various sexual vices portrayed in the Old Testament are wrong, but rather to highlight God's heart for justice, mercy, and compassion. It is clear to see why these vices are wrong, as they go against God's design for marriage and sex as portrayed in the creation narrative and are usually explicitly forbidden in the Mosaic law. However, Lamb shows how in all of the situations where a sexual vice is performed, God's heart is once again justice, compassion, and mercy. God seeks justice for perpetrators of sexual sin, for going against his good design is a serious issue. Often times, these perpetrators are powerful men who, because of the curse given in Genesis 3, use their power for the dominance and exploitation of women. Because of this, God shows compassion on victims of such sexual sins. Often times, the Mosaic law is set up to protect the victim in the midst of the injustice that was done to them. Lastly, in all of this, God shows mercy

on perpetrators and victims alike. This is shown throughout the Old Testament, and culminates in his Son Jesus Christ dying on behalf of sinners. This is why God is often against those who do not show mercy or compassion. In all of this, it is clear to see from these stories that while humans are sinful, God is merciful. Sex is a powerful thing because of its unique design and role in humanity. This is why engaging in stories of sexual sin show us a picture of human sinfulness and God's graciousness in a way that nothing else can.

## **Exegetical Paper**

**Romans 1:26-27:** Paul explains that God has handed the Gentiles over to their disgraceful passions, and that they have received an appropriate penalty for their error.

- I. God has delivered men over to their disgraceful passions (1:26a)**
- II. Women have committed shameless acts with women, and men with men (1:26b-27a)**
  - a. Women have traded their natural relations for unnatural ones (1:26b)
  - b. Men have left their relations with women in their lust for one another (1:27a)
- III. Because of these shameless acts, they have received the appropriate penalty (1:27b)**
  - a. Men have committed shameless acts with men (1:27b)
  - b. Men have received in their own persons the appropriate penalty for their error (1:27b)

### **God has delivered men over to their disgraceful passions (1:26a)**

These two verses are a smaller section in what is a larger discourse of Paul's thoughts, Romans 1:24-32. In this larger discourse, Paul shows how Gentiles had the means to know God through natural revelation, but instead chose to worship creation over the creator. For this reason, Paul says, God handed them over to their sinful desires, which are not natural and fitting to the design God has for humanity. Paul ends by listing what these Gentiles are, which is a list of sinful and disgraceful virtues. Seeing the larger context of Paul's writing gives us an understanding of these particular verses. It is because Gentiles worship creation over the creator that causes God to hand them over to their sinful passions. It is hard to tell from this section alone what "disgraceful passions" are, but v.27 helps clear this up.

### **Women have committed shameless acts with women, and men with men (126b-27)**

Paul goes on to clarify these disgraceful passions by saying that "their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. The men in the same way also left natural relations

with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another<sup>1</sup>.” It is again unclear what Paul is referring to when speaking about the women, but we get some clarity with the men. It is here that Paul gets specific, saying that they were inflamed in their lust for one another. It seems that Paul is addressing homosexuality here, as the textual evidence points in that direction. Schreiner points out that an option for figuring out why Paul chose homosexuality as his sexual sin of choice is because of its stark contrast to sex between a man and a woman<sup>2</sup>. Paul could possibly be showing that such as homosexual relations are completely unnatural to heterosexual relations, worshipping idols is completely unnatural to worshipping the true God.

Schreiner also notes that some scholars have argued that Paul is not condemning homosexuality as a whole, but only homosexual acts performed by those who are heterosexual in nature. However, Paul is most likely not thinking in terms of individualized preference, but comes from a Stoic and Hellenistic Jewish background that views homosexuality as contrary to the created order<sup>3</sup>. Much Jewish literature in that day refers to homosexuality as wrong, and Paul would have certainly viewed it in this way across the board for all people.

Other scholars have argued that Paul is referring to pederasty specifically here, which is the homosexual relation between a man and a boy. The argument behind this is that since this is by far the most common form of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world, it surely is what Paul is referring to here. However, Paul makes no mention here, but rather talks about

---

<sup>1</sup> All scripture references will be in CSB unless otherwise specified.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

homosexuality as a whole<sup>4</sup>. From all of this, most conservative scholars believe homosexuality as a whole was what Paul is referring to in this passage.

**Because of these shameless acts, they have received the appropriate penalty (1:27b)**

This passage has been and currently is controversial among scholars. This is mainly due to the fact that Paul says that those who have been handed over to their passions have a penalty within themselves. Schreiner points out that this penalty is not anything in addition to homosexuality, but is the homosexuality itself. This ties into the original theme of the passage, which is that the initial sin glorifying things other than God lead to other sins<sup>5</sup>. Unnatural sexual relations is the penalty of unnatural sexual relations because Paul understands that anything that is not within the bounds of the created order leads to a path of destruction. It is only through a proper worship of God will humans get to live how they were created by God to live.

---

<sup>4</sup> John W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Schreiner, 96.



## **Bibliography**

Lamb, David T. *Prostitutes and Polygamists*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998.

Stott, John W. *The Message of Romans*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994.