



The Kingdom Perspective

Marriage and Sex in Rome

Hello! This is Pastor Don of Christ Redeemer Church. Welcome to The Kingdom Perspective!

One of the things that distinguished Christians in ancient Rome was their ethic on sex and marriage.

To the average Roman, sex was largely detached from marriage; it was merely a “natural” impulse to be fulfilled. Male virtue was in part judged by the strength of one’s sexual appetite and exploits. This was not seen as a problem, but as a positive feature.

Many are shocked to learn of temple prostitution—the use of sex in pagan worship. At the temple, it was perfectly normal for a man to hire one of the many prostitutes that worked there. Depending on the temple, these prostitutes could be either male or female.

Now, in this context, followers of Jesus were maligned as prudes. Following Holy Scripture, Christians reserved sex for a loving marital relationship between a husband and a wife (Genesis 2:18-24 & Matthew 19:3-9). Anything outside this bond, they considered “sexual immorality”.

Now, this idea of “sexual immorality” was largely foreign to their pagan neighbors. Having a wife was primarily an economic choice, a way to have children and manage one’s home. And so, for the Roman male, it was perfectly legitimate to find one’s sexual pleasure outside the bonds of marriage. For many men this was fulfilled not only with temple prostitutes but also in relations with other men. Many of the Roman Emperors had male lovers. Nero even “married” his (the former slave Pythagoras), with Nero himself donning the role of “the bride” at the “wedding”. Don’t forget, it was Nero who began the Roman persecution of Christians.

Now, I say all this to emphasize we need not get uptight at our present cultural circumstance, as sad as it may be. As faithful Christians, we are standing not only on the “right side of history”, but also with our ancient brothers and sisters, who were likewise misunderstood and maligned in their day for their faithfulness to God’s commandments.

Something to think about from The Kingdom Perspective.

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

‘Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,

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and Christ will shine on you.”

~ Ephesians 5:1-14 (ESV)

Some sources to consider:

Sexual Morality in a Christless World by Matthew Rueger (Concordia Publishing 2016).

Catharine Edwards (1997). *Unspeakable Professions: Public Performance and Prostitution in Ancient Rome*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press).

Thomas A. J. McGinn (2004). *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World*. (University of Michigan Press).

Lauren Weisner (2014). “The Social Effect the Law had on Prostitutes in Ancient Rome”. *Grand Valley Journal of History*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 4.

Pythagoras, Emperor Nero’s Freedman
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pythagoras_\(freedman\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pythagoras_(freedman))

Male prostitutes in ancient Rome
<https://oxfordre.com/classics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-7337;jsessionid=09BD76DBF5980570A1B83F28DD9B86CB>

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