

Review: Not Under Bondage

Barbara Roberts' book is subtitled "Biblical Divorce for Abuse, Adultery & Desertion." It is a thorough consideration of how issues surrounding divorce and remarriage are handled by Scripture. While there is a definite pastoral aspect to this book (Roberts herself has been through an abusive marriage) it's main approach is *exegetical*. After setting the scene, and summarising her conclusions and where she is coming from, Roberts makes a decent consideration of relevant Pauline (1 Corinthians 7 in particular) and Old Testament passages as well as unpacking the teaching of Jesus.



The questions are clear: What are the Biblical grounds for divorce? And, if divorce is allowed, is remarriage also allowed? She helpfully puts forward the key concepts at the beginning of the book:

- *The Bible distinguishes between "treacherous divorce" and "disciplinary divorce".*
- *Disciplinary divorce is permitted by the Bible. This applies in cases of abuse, adultery or desertion, where a seriously mistreated spouse divorces a seriously offending spouse.*
- *Treacherous divorce is condemned by the Bible. It occurs when a spouse obtains divorce for reasons other than abuse, adultery or desertion.*
- *If the offending partner was sexually immoral, the Bible allows the non-offending partner to remarry.*
- *If the offending partner was abused, deserted or unjustly dismissed the other, and the offender has been judged to be "as an unbeliever", the Bible allows the mistreated partner to remarry.*

By taking an exegetical approach Roberts is providing a service to victims of abuse who tend, often as a consequence of their abuse, to be “better at understanding the *letter* of God’s Word than they are at interpreting general principles from scripture.” (Page 37, emphasis mine). Here there is assistance to those who are vulnerable to being on the receiving end of scripture misapplied cruelly and abusively.

Coming to this book from a pastoral point of view I was encouraged by some of her conclusions. For instance, in general, the principle that “it is impossible to tell a victim that she ought to leave or stay at any particular juncture – the decision when or whether to leave must be left to each victim... all we can do is lay out the biblical principles that permit separation and help the victim to assess the discernible risk factors, leaving the ultimate choice to her.” (Page 43) When people come for answers what they often really looking for is empowerment, freedom to choose the right thing.

The main food for thought for me was her consideration of 1 Corinthians 7. In particular, a key plank in her “abuse is grounds for divorce” argument rests on firstly, the equating of the abuser with being an “unbeliever” who has left (or has brought a separation to the marriage – see Page 48) , and secondly, the necessity for church discipline to determine whether the abusing party is “acting as an unbeliever.” The exegesis may need some strengthening in parts but I do not think this is an invalid application of a difficult text. It certainly aligns with her aim of allowing *all* of Scripture to speak – a harmonizing of Moses, Jesus and Paul (Page 108), if you like.

This part, and the rest of the book, certainly gels with my experience (and myriad mistakes) in engaging with people who are facing marital breakdown. I think evangelical considerations of marriage often take an overly-sacramental view that inappropriately elevates the covenantal bond to something eternal and unbreakable. My analogy is that in

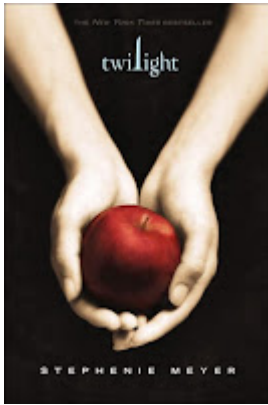
marriage a new “unit” is formed (the couple in unity) – it is valuable, like a person. It should not be harmed, but can be harmed, it should not be killed, but can be killed. Roberts unpacks how the Bible affirms the value of marriage in the strongest possible way, without becoming separated from the reality that marriage covenants are broken.

Roberts’ insistence on church discipline should not be ignored. Yet, for me, it is the most difficult of her exhortations. Not because I disagree with her in the principle of it – but overwhelmed by the practice of it. So often it is incredibly difficult to find out what the truth is behind a marriage breakdown: who is the abuser, who is not? is the marriage sick, or just broken? is what the person saying a true expression of victimhood or manipulative lie? Roberts would do well to expand on *how* church leadership may go about exercising the judgement it needs to exercise.

For those trapped in abuse – particular those who are or have experienced religious justifications for that abuse – this book is invaluable. For those expected to give Biblically-grounded advice, this book is a must-read. I by-and-large agree with Roberts’ principles but they need careful application wrapped in a cry to God for wisdom.



Review: Twilight



So I read it. For the same reason I read *Harry Potter* ten years ago – I need to have an opinion on it, and I can't form that opinion without reading it. I'm talking about Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* of course. It's an immensely popular, bestselling, movie-spinning mega-book. My comments below will only be about the first book in the series. I'm not planning to read any of

the others.

So what did I make of it? Like J. K. Rowling, Stephenie Meyer has been the target of the full blast of Christiosity zeal. Here, apparently, is yet another piece of worldly literature sucking us into dabbling with the occult and surrendering our souls to dark things. I discount that attack. The seduction is not attached to the occult and the darkness is attached more to the reality of the human soul than with dancing with the devil in the pale moonlight. It is not the fact that this book has vampires in it that I'd prefer my daughter to wait a little bit longer before she reads it.

If *Harry* was *Star Wars* for Generation Y – the child of destiny meeting his potential – this book is *Pretty Woman* – the forgotten girl mixing with manly power and holding her own in complete helplessness. Here is feminine weakness repulsed but attracted to dangerous masculinity. Here is feminine attractiveness drawing out both the potential and horror of the masculine conundrum. It is written well – the first person narrative drawing us into the intimacy of internal thoughts and, while avoiding being too explicit, causing us to engage with the bit-lip heart-skipping blood-rushing sensuality of near-fatal attraction. No wonder it's popular.

For those who don't know the story is simple – big town nerdy girl moves to small town and encounters mysterious boy. Boy is vampire, caught between his blood-thirst for the girl and his surprising affection for her. Girl finds out he is a vampire yet is drawn to him, desiring both his safety and his danger.

Hear the pulse of the female psyche. The chapter where they spend their first significant time alone together is the crux of it all. She wants to be close to him, comfort him, be comforted by him. Knowing that he could kill her, almost wanting him to take her "wondering, if it would hurt very much... if it ended badly." He is like an addict and she is both his addiction and his salvation: "Common sense told me I should be terrified. Instead, I was relieved to finally understand. And I was filled with compassion for his suffering, even now, as he confessed his craving to take my life."

She both delights in her ability to confound him (she is the only mind he cannot read) and at the same time she swoons, literally, with every kiss. She is his adventure and he takes her on one. And then the action sequence encapsulates the rocky road of the reality of their relationship – how will it ever be consummated (figuratively speaking)? Should she become like him, take on his identity, become a vampire herself, despite the pain?

It's fairy tale from start to finish. But where the passion in a different era would have been wrapped up with sex – a useless gambit in this sexually desensitised generation – it is now wrapped up in blood lust. What in one era would have been an interplay between feminine wiles and passivity and the sexual drive and chivalry of the man is now explored through the concept of a vampire's addiction and honour and a girl's intellectual strength and physical dependence. How else could you get away with a main character who faints, stumbles and is always being swooped up and protected by the main man?

Where Jane Austen would have the girl battle with losing her identity in marriage, longing for a proposal, here it is about longing for a painful but transformative venomous bite. I guess girls wanting a knight in shining armour still exist... and buy books.

As with *Harry*, so with *Twilight* – the danger of this book is not occult but fantasy. Too many people (many of which are too young) will get lost in it detrimentally. There must be more to life than this.

And there is.

