

HUMAN SEXUALITY: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

This morning we're going to be looking at a difficult and delicate subject – our sexuality – and we're going to be looking at it from a Christian perspective. The secular world tries to teach us that we are almost completely defined by our sexuality, that our sexual desires are virtually irresistible, that sexual activity between consenting adults is purely a private matter and that the Christian or Biblical perspective is outdated, outmoded and irrelevant. This presentation will contend that all of these secular teachings are wrong and indeed dangerous and harmful.

This morning will be a joint presentation by both Giles and myself. After this introduction I'm going to be looking at the Biblical perspective on our sexuality and what the Bible has to tell us about how we should use and enjoy our sexuality. Then Giles is going to cover sex outside marriage, homosexuality and lesbianism – again from a Biblical perspective. After that I'm going to cover attitudes to these issues in current society and how science and the medical profession can illuminate these issues. Giles is then going to take over again and look at the historical position of the Anglican Church on these issues, how the church has been moved by the world and where we are today, particularly on the issue of same sex marriage and relationships in the wake of the Pilling Report and the recent Synod discussions. Then finally I'm going to attempt to give us an overall conclusion to the debate.

Of course, our sexuality is a very broad subject. The Bible teaches or illustrates a great deal about our sexual behaviour much of it only indirectly related to what I've just said we're going to cover. For instance the Bible deals with adultery, prostitution, the grounds for divorce, concubinage, bestiality, infertility, teenage pregnancy, incest, paedophilia, rape, cross-dressing, menstruation, nocturnal emissions, coitus interruptus and erotic literature. We might also want to consider a Christian reaction to things like pornography, masturbation, sexually transmitted diseases, the age of consent, sexualisation of children, abortion, artificial insemination by donor, etc. But, we're not proposing to cover these issues in any depth today – although I will be mentioning one or two issues such as incest and paedophilia as they are linked with issues we *are* covering.

HUMAN SEXUALITY IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

Scripture as the Ultimate Authority

I would hope that within our Christian community we are all fully agreed that the Bible is the ultimate authority for shaping and indeed determining our views as Christians on all issues, including our sexuality. It's true that the Bible is sometimes speaking into a particular situation or into a particular cultural context. For example, all of Paul's letters are pastoral letters to particular churches and particularly address the problems those churches were facing at the time. But that doesn't entitle us to ignore or totally revise what is being said; it merely means that we have to interpret what Paul is saying, and the subjects he has chosen to concentrate on, in the light of what we can know about the situations he was dealing with.

The same holds true of the OT. It was written in a particular culture which was very different from our culture today, but again that doesn't entitle us to ignore or revise what was written, only to enable such knowledge to enlighten our understanding of what is written.

Furthermore, we humans don't change very much. Fundamentally we're the same as the people of Jesus' time or even Moses' time. We may have more scientific knowledge, but we're not really more intelligent or sophisticated. We have the same lusts and desires, the same hungers, the same capacity to sin. So the Biblical teaching on moral issues is just as valid today as when it was written several thousand years ago.

The Bible is God's revelation, his inspired word to us. Yes it was written by humans, but under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is 100% God and yet 100% human. In the same way the Bible is 100% written by men and yet 100% God's inspired and true word to us. The Bible is thus the primary and indeed the final authority for our faith and the way we are to live our lives. As Christians it is the first place we are to look for guidance and it's also the last place of appeal on all moral issues. As Christians we are not free to produce new codes of behaviour or morality which diverge from Biblical principles no matter how sophisticated or enlightened we may think we are. Our knowledge is puny and insignificant compared to God's knowledge and perspective.

Having dealt with that issue, let's now look at what the Bible has to tell us about our sexuality.

The Biblical Perspective on Sexuality

To get the true Biblical perspective on human sexuality we have to go back right to the beginning – to God's creation of humanity. This is first mentioned in Genesis chapter 1 verses 26-28:

“Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:26-28 NIV)

In Genesis chapter 2 we see that God created the female sex explicitly as a complement for the male – look at Genesis 2 verse 18:

“The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18 NIV)

and that the creation of woman was closely associated with man and intended to create an intimate and complimentary bonding – look at verses 20 to 25:

“So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” (Genesis 2:20-25 NIV)

There are a number of things I want you to note here. Firstly, these early chapters of Genesis predate man's rebellion against God – The Fall. Thus we can take it that they describe God's ideal creation when the whole of creation was described as 'good' (Genesis 1:31). Secondly, there was no suitable companion found for Adam from amongst the animal kingdom. Adam was unable to relate closely or intimately with any creature in the animal kingdom – that's why sexual activity with animals or bestiality is wrong and contrary to God's creation ordinances. It was specifically forbidden by OT Law for both men and women (Leviticus 18:23). Thirdly, verse 24 specifically proclaims and approves marriage between a man and a woman and the resultant sexual union between them and verse 25 says that they are to have no shame in such intimacy. God did not make another man or some kind of creature as a companion for Adam – he made a woman. That is God's fundamental creation ordinance. Finally, I believe that the marriage union between man and woman in which they become one flesh models something of the rich union we find between the persons of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The unity found in the diversity and complementarity of man and woman models the complementarity and diversity found amongst the persons of the Trinity. Like the persons of the Trinity a married man and woman are equal, yet they are different and have different roles. This is a wonderful God given blessing which no other relationship can replicate. A relationship between two men or two women just doesn't have the necessary complementarity and unity in diversity.

The verses from Genesis chapter 2 we've been looking at were quoted by Jesus himself as the authority for his statement about marriage to the Pharisees – look at Matthew chapter 19 verses 3 to 8:

"Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matthew 19:3-6 NIV)

We were created as gendered beings and that is precisely why we have the institution of marriage. Marriage is predicated on our being male and female. Jesus' logic is clear: humanity has been made in two genders, *therefore* there is the institution of marriage. Marriage would not exist if there were no difference in gender. Here Jesus is also reminding us of the authority that stands behind these words – God the creator. The verses we've been quoting from Genesis are the direct words of the creator – Jesus confirms that.

The next thing Jesus emphasises is the resulting 'one flesh'. The marriage partners are no longer two but one. Jesus is not saying that the two have become indistinguishable, that they've lost their individual personalities, but a joining process has taken place, brought about by their sexual union, and the two are now designed to be inseparable. Furthermore the agency of this joining process is God himself. The union is now so deep and profound that new life – children – can flow from it

The verses from Genesis were also quoted by Paul when he was writing to the Corinthians and teaching them about the wrongness of sexual immorality – look at 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verses 12 to 20:

"Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual

immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:12-20 NIV)

Sex was designed by God to be enjoyed within the framework of marriage between a man and a woman.

So, we see that the verses we've looked at in Genesis are not in themselves commands from God – they're descriptions of God's creative work. However, going back, as they do, to before the Fall, they provide a particularly authoritative basis for Biblical commands and for the construction of a Biblically based sexual ethic and were used in this way than no lesser authorities than Jesus and Paul.

I think we can see that the Genesis accounts affirm the following propositions:

1. Reproduction is good;
2. Sex is good within the correct context;
3. Marriage is good, again within the correct context; and
4. Male and female are necessary and complementary counterparts.

On the first of these propositions – reproduction – we need to return to Genesis chapter 1 and verse 28:

"God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."" (Genesis 1:28 NIV)

From this point onwards the Bible assumes the goodness of reproduction, perhaps most clearly in God's promised blessing to Abraham in Genesis 17:2:

"I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."" (Genesis 17:2 NIV). Particularly within the OT, to bear children was to receive a blessing from God – Psalm 127:3:

"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him." (Psalm 127:3 NIV)

In fact we can see reproduction as an aspect of God's salvation plan, centred first on the covenant with Abraham and through him Israel, then on the incarnation of the Messiah (John 1:14; 1 John 4:2) and finally on the perfected community of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22). At that point marriage comes to an end (and presumably sex and reproduction) (Mark 12:25), not because these things are bad but because they have fulfilled their purpose.

So reproduction is good, and I expect that Giles will return to this issue later, but our sexuality is deeper than that. Most heterosexual couples enjoy sexual intimacy in many ways in addition to the potentially reproductive act of coitus. Indeed in our world today we might well argue that we should limit reproduction as part of our stewardship of this world – a role to which God appointed man – Genesis 1:28:

“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”” (Genesis 1:28 NIV)

for our subjugation is to be a Godly rule fully in accordance with God’s responsible principles. We are to rule with justice, righteousness and mercy (Micah 6:8).

Let’s turn now to the second of our propositions – sex is good. The facts that Adam rejoices in God’s gift of the woman with whom he becomes one flesh and the fact that they are unashamed in the naked presence of one another (Genesis 2:23-25) imply that the sexual act is not a shameful but a beautiful experience – which Genesis expresses in poetry.

Furthermore a brief glance at the Song of Songs shows us a beautiful and joyful celebration of sexuality. Even if this book does have allegorical meanings, there is no doubt that the basic language is explicitly sexual and erotic poetry. In the NT Paul asserts that husband and wife both have rights to sexual pleasure and should not abstain for long – see 1 Corinthians 7:4-5:

“The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Corinthians 7:4-5 NIV).

In the pagan culture of the first century AD – when the NT was being written – matter (and hence the body) was thought to be less important than the soul and more irrelevant to morality. This often led to sexually permissive behaviour, although its effect on the Christian community was to gradually turn it to an ascetic mindset in which all physical desires were to be denied. Neither of these viewpoints finds support in the Bible – at least as regards sexual activity within its proper Biblical context, that of marriage between one man and one woman. But, we do see examples of both the amoral and the ascetic approaches amongst NT Christians, so the “amoral” approach is apparent in the church in Corinth whilst the ascetic approach seems to have manifested itself in the Colossian church – as this approach is challenged in Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

However, we must never forget that sex was not given to us by God solely and simply for our pleasure. Rather God gave us sex so that we might share in God’s generative power through his gift of reproduction: in and through love making new people to love. Only monogamous heterosexual partnership can produce children in the joining in partnership of two fully complementary people who can, as parents, love and nurture their children within a naturally bonded family unit where these children can find a model in the same sex parent for the correct development of their own sexuality.

Our third proposition was that marriage is good, again within the Biblical context of marriage between one man and one woman. This is implied in the Genesis passages we have quoted, is assumed as a matter of course throughout the OT, and was radically affirmed by Jesus in the passage we already quoted:

“Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.””

(Matthew 19:3-6 NIV)

Marriage between a man and a woman is not a simple contract but a covenant union. Our quote from Genesis chapter 2 verses 20 to 25 – which is affirmed by Jesus in the above quotation from Matthew – makes that quite clear. Paul also affirms marriage as a mutually dependant covenant union in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5:

“But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Corinthians 7:2-5 NIV)

and as a lifelong union in Romans 7:2-3:

“For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.”

(Romans 7:2-3 NIV)

Genesis. Jesus and Paul all teach that marriage should be a lifelong covenant union between one man and one woman, although the Bible does recognise that in our imperfect world separation and divorce will occur.

Our fourth proposition that male and female are necessary and complementary counterparts is supported first by God’s initial creation statement in Genesis 1:27. Adam is not given an animal or another man as a companion he is given a female and he delights in the way she complements him – Genesis 2:23:

“The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’, for she was taken out of man."” (Genesis 2:23 NIV)

Because their union completes the incompleteness of each other there is the desire to ‘leave family and become united’ – Genesis 2:24:

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24 NIV)

The two sexes joined together in an indissoluble union remedy what would be their incompleteness apart from one another. The pair are complete counterparts, including their physical make-up. This speaks to me of the Trinity, the marriage partners are completely united yet different. Nothing else apart from the joining together of a man and a woman in marriage mirrors so completely the unity of the persons within the Trinity. That’s why God has limited sexual activity to one man and one woman joined together in marriage.

Marriage in Scripture

So what does the Bible have to tell us about marriage – which in scripture always means heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman. From now on I’m going to use the word ‘marriage’ in that sense, unless it’s specifically qualified. Well we’ve already seen that marriage is primarily for reproduction (within responsible limits), for mutual sexual gratification and for mutual companionship and support.

As regards reproduction and mutual sexual gratification, the Bible tells us that there are two alternative possibilities, childlessness and celibacy (long term or permanent abstinence). In the Bible childlessness was involuntary and considered unfortunate but not sinful. Today there may well be a case for responsibly limiting family size, although voluntary complete childlessness can often be selfish. Adoption was a possible remedy for childlessness from earliest times.

Celibacy is affirmed in the NT for believers who are not married (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8):
“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no-one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 NIV)

or who were formerly married:

“Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.” (1 Corinthians 7:8 NIV)

Indeed celibacy is the only Biblically approved possibility for unmarried believers.

There is no scriptural objection to a widow remarrying if she wishes:

“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 7:39 NIV)

“So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.” (1 Timothy 5:14 NIV)

Partners in marriage are called to be faithful to one another. The one flesh principle from Genesis 2:24 makes it clear that man and wife are joined in such close union that nothing should disrupt it. This principle is embodied in the seventh commandment (Exodus 20:14) as a clear prohibition:

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14 NIV)

Scripture regards this as so serious that it’s paired with murder (Jeremiah 7:9), and with shedding blood (Ezekiel 16:38)

All departures from the normative principle of marriage involving sexual relations are sinful. In chapter 2 of his letter to the Romans Paul teaches that we have no right to condemn others whilst engaging in sexual sins ourselves. Nevertheless I doubt if any of us are not troubled by fallen-ness in the area of sexuality. We sin in different ways some of us seek thrills in new partners, some of us find sex threatening and withdraw physically and emotionally from our spouses (contrary to the Biblical command in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 we’ve already quoted), yet others have secret additions to pornography or private fantasies.

The God who knows all our thoughts and deeds knows that we all need forgiveness in this area. God offers us that forgiveness:

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9 NIV)

and also offers us the power to move to greater maturity in our sexuality:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:1-5 NIV)

“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.” (1 Peter 4:1-3 NIV)

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” (1 Peter 5:10 NIV)

So we're called to a very high Biblical standard in marriage and our sexual relationships, but God offers us His grace.

SCRIPTURAL TEACHING ON SEX OUTSIDE MARRIAGE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Adult attitudes to adultery?

David has introduced the Bible's teaching on a number of sex-related matters, ending with faithfulness in marriage ... and conversely, adultery.

As this is spelt out in black and white in the 10 Commandments, repeated in the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, I hope we can agree that adultery is wrong, immoral ... in biblical terms, sinful.

In western society a radical change has taken place over the last 100 years. Freudian psychology, reliable contraception and drugs against sexually transmitted diseases have all combined with our inbuilt sinfulness to make our attitude to sexual chastity much more elastic than it was. Films, books, magazines, the internet and even our education system have removed many taboos: those who want to engage in extra-marital sex can find lots of justification for doing so. But still our society is shocked by the betrayal of trust involved in adultery. The most prurient tabloids will still condemn a “love-rat”.

But what about sex where neither partner is married? Or, to use an old-fashioned term, “fornication”.

“Fornication”.

I'm using the term “adultery” to mean sexual activity outside of marriage where at least one partner is married to someone else. So the unmarried woman who sleeps with a married man is still committing adultery (they both are, even though she'd not married).

Of course, sex outside of marriage where neither is married is a different category. In heterosexual terms, it used to be called “fornication”: that's a term which is rarely used nowadays, but for the sake of clarity I shall use it this morning. Because neither party has

promised the exclusive faithfulness of marriage, fornication is free of the betrayal of solemn covenant which characterises adultery. President Hollande may be a cad and a bounder in how he's treated Valérie Trierweiler, but he hasn't broken a marriage vow. So is fornication wrong? What is the Christian position on this?

I don't want to take up huge amounts of time on this, but here are a few key points:

* For the reasons I've outlined just now, fornication is one important step less bad than adultery: it's not betraying a marriage vow.

* In my experience, heterosexual fornication is far more of an issue in church life than homosexual sex. We should take this every bit as seriously as same-sex "immorality".

The context for sexual activity in the Old Testament

The fundamental biblical teaching on sexual activity goes back to Genesis: "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2.24). [This passage is quoted 4 times in the New Testament by Christ and the Apostles.] The sexual union implied by "one flesh" depends on the prior social recognition (leaving father and mother), a two-sex relationship (a man ... his wife), and a permanent commitment of uniting [Heb. *dbq* = be glued/soldered to] between husband and wife.

In other words, sex belonged within marriage.

Marriage was the duty of every Jewish man. This was designed to perpetuate the family line: hence the need for Levirate marriage where this norm was in danger of being unfulfilled. This understanding of marriage reinforced it as the only legitimate context for sexual activity. Marriages were often arranged on behalf of the young man by his parents (e.g. Genesis 21.21; 36.8.) — probably an indication that his marriage would normally have taken place at a relatively young age. The expression "the wife of your youth" (Proverbs 5.18; Malachi 2.14-15) seems to corroborate this.

Not only animals, but humans had to enter the ark in male-female pairs (Genesis 6.18-20). There were no doubt exceptions to the universality of marriage in ancient Israel; but Jeremiah's call to singleness and childlessness (Jeremiah 16.2) is unparalleled in the Old Testament. It was a prophetic indication of the abnormal times in which he lived. Concubinage and polygamy existed alongside the original ideal of monogamy, as did divorce. All of these arrangements were regulated to some extent by legal rights and commitments (e.g. Exodus 21.7-11), and stand apart from prostitution or promiscuity. [The Old Testament never formally forbids these arrangements, but frequently illustrates and comments on the deficiencies and unwelcome consequences of departing from lifelong monogamy.]

1d. Premarital sex in the Old Testament

In the world of the Old Testament, pre-marital sex was considered such a grievous sin, it was punishable by death (Deuteronomy 22.13-21,23-27); for this reason proof of virginity was sought (Deuteronomy 22.13-21). To imply that the bride had been sexually active before marriage was to give "an evil name to a virgin of Israel" (Deuteronomy 22.19). The effect of this was to make a non-virginal bride virtually unmarriageable, as we see later in Joseph's attitude to his betrothed Mary. In such cases, the man who had seduced her could be obliged to marry her (Exodus 22.16-17; Deuteronomy 22.28-29). Priests were forbidden to marry a woman who was no longer a virgin (Leviticus 21.7).

Having concubines certainly departs from this ideal, but even here there were social conventions and protections: it was far from casual sex or transitory “living together”.

1e. Extramarital sex in the New Testament

Jesus teaches that for the Christian, the options are marriage, or making oneself a eunuch (i.e. forgoing sex and marriage) for the sake of the kingdom (Matthew 19.12).

If lustful looks face the same punishment as adultery (Matthew 5.28), we can assume that Jesus would not have condoned the act of extramarital sex.

He warns us “Out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery (moicheia), porneia, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person ...” (Matthew 15.19-20 // Mark 7.21-23). Porneia here is a separate category of sin from adultery, and in the context of Matthew, is most naturally understood as unmarried sexual activity.

Without going into labourious detail, I can assure you that the rest of the New Testament follows the teaching of Jesus.

Fornication or prostitution?

It is sometimes argued that the word sometimes translated as “fornication” (porneia) only refers to prostitution. I’ve argued at some length elsewhere that this can’t be correct. The word covers a broad range of sexual sins (including incest and prostitution), but doesn’t intrinsically imply sex-for money.

The Graeco-Roman world was rather schizophrenic about these matters, somewhat like modern western society. All sorts of sexual licence went on, and yet the need for strict chastity were also upheld. The pagan world into which Christianity burst was far from the biblical ideals which the Christians promoted. But it would have understood them.

To conclude this section, we can say with confidence that sex outside marriage was considered wrong, immoral and sinful in the Old Testament and in the New. That is still our benchmark for gauging these things.

Homosexuality in the Bible.

We need to remember all that background when we come to consider the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality: fundamentally the Bible and Christian tradition state that the right context for sexual activity is marriage, and that marriage is heterosexual. Outside of that, the option for a Christian, says Jesus, is abstinence.

Defining terms.

“Homosexuality” is a modern term, and so it is never used as such in the Bible. It is also capable of several different meanings; for example, it can define the condition of someone who experiences what’s sometimes called “same-sex attraction” (SSA) or “same-sex sexual orientation”, or “being homophile” — regardless of whether they subsequently engage in same-sex sexual activity. It’s important to stress that this morning I am not primarily talking about “Same-sex attraction” or “sexual orientation”, still less for preferring friendship and companionship with those of the same sex. None of those things are immoral or sinful, and can be entirely compatible with godly chastity.

What I am trying to discuss this morning is an explicitly sexual expression of such orientation. It may or may not involve penetrative intercourse, but would involve intimate physical contact and stimulation. It's the sort of thing that would be considered adulterous in nature if a married heterosexual engaged in it.

“Homosexual activity” might express what we are talking about, but (a) it might be understood to exclude lesbianism, and (b) going to work on the train is an activity homosexuals engage in — so it's all rather too imprecise.

To make it clear that I am talking about sexual expressions of Same-sex attraction, I shall use the term “homosex”, even though (a) it's clumsy, and (b) lots of people don't use it or like it.

For the following passages, I've opted to use the New Revised Standard Version. This has pros and cons, as we shall see. Do follow in the NIV if you wish: this also has pros and cons...

“Homosex” in the Old Testament

The sin of Sodom: Genesis 19.1-9

You probably remember the context [...] The key verse is probably verse 5: “and they called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.’” (NRSV)

The language used is fairly simple, the main point of interest is the verb *yada`* = “know” being used in the sense of sexual intercourse. It could, of course, just mean they wanted to meet the visitors, but the context shows that it's more than that: Lot offers his daughters in verse 8, saying they've not “known” a man.

The other point to note is that the text makes it very clear in verse 4 that the crowd outside Lot's house were all male; and although we know from verse 1 that Lot's visitors were angels, the crowd considered them to be *anashim* “men”, adult males.

So what was the sin of Sodom? For the time being, we can safely say that it included the following: Men, old and young, wanted to have carnal knowledge with Lot's visitors whom they considered “men”. They were uninterested in Lot's (scandalous) offer of sex with his virgin daughters (8).

Ezekiel 16.49-50 stresses that there were various types of iniquity committed at Sodom (not just attempted male rape). But Ezekiel's list includes *to`ebah*. Which brings us on to Leviticus.

Leviticus 18.22

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” (NRSV)

Key words:

(*zakar*) = male. There are several words for adult male, such as *ish*, *gibber*, etc. “Adam” often has a more generic meaning of “human being”.

(*shakab*) = lie down (here -> sexual relations)(*mishkab*) = place or act of lying (here -> intercourse)

(*to`ebah*) = abomination, detestable thing *cp תעב Qal* = be abhorred; *Piel* = abhor or cause to be abhorred]

To`ebah included cult prostitution (m & f), idolatry, human sacrifice, child sacrifice, paedophilia (Leviticus 18.10), fraud and homosex. All of these to`ebah sins are punishable by “cutting off from the community” (Leviticus 18.29), which seems to mean the death penalty (cp Leviticus 20.13).

Leviticus 20.13 is rather similar, though it includes the sanction against homosex:
“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.” (NRSV)

Other Old Testament material

There are other references to homosex in the Old Testament: the demand for male sex from the men of Gibeah in Judges 19.22. It’s likely that the sin of Ham (or Canaan) against drunken Noah had some homophile or homosex component. The Old Testament periodically mentions male cult prostitutes, who may have been for the benefit of the male as well as female pagan worshippers. The prescription against cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22.5) is a related phenomenon.

The New Testament passages

The Gospels.

If Jesus ever addressed the issue of homosex, it is nowhere recorded in the New Testament. People draw different conclusions from this silence.

(A) He never condemned it so it must be OK.

(B) He never contradicted the Old Testament teaching, so he must be taking it as read.

Arguments from silence are notoriously open to manipulation, but I think the latter view is more convincing and more likely.

Where we can be more sure is in the three New Testament texts which refer explicitly to homosex.

Romans 1.24-27

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.” (NRSV)

Key words:

akatharsia (24) - uncleanness ~ impurity

ktisis (25) - creation

physis (26) - nature, natural characteristic, created order Probably associated in Paul’s mind with his discussion of creation/creature/Creator in previous verse (25).

physikos (26) - natural (etc)

para physin (26) - against nature, unnatural

Notes

A: homosex related to a denial of the Creator and the created order (24: a deliberate reference back to Genesis 1 and the provision of male-female marriage).

B: Paul uses language of impurity (24) to refer to the degrading of the body. Presumably a conscious reference to the purity codes of Leviticus. Cp 6.19: you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity ... (cf 13.13-14). Paul applies the old language of ritual purity to Christian moral purity.

C: Paul acknowledges that those who do these things are giving in to “the urges of their heart”. This implies that it was an inner urge — perhaps innate — but it was still “contrary to nature”.

D: Paul uses a large number of negative words to describe this “degradation”: shaming (atimazesthai) one’s body, indecent acts (aschemosune), shameful passions (pathe atimias), contrary to nature (para physin).

E: This passage is the only one to mention Lesbian activity.

F: The “vice-list” continues (29-31), and we should take that list of sins very seriously, too. Far from trivialising them to excuse homosex, Paul refers back to the Levitical sanctions against all such sins: They know that God’s law says that people who live in this way deserve death. (32)

1 Corinthians 6.9-11

“Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (NRSV)

Key words:

pornos (9) - a very all-inclusive word for someone engaged sexual immorality. It’s sometimes translated “fornicator” as in NRSV, i.e. premarital sex; but it has a much broader reference, and in the previous chapter it referred to a case of incest (5.1). In 1st Century Jewish and early Christian usage it referred generally to sex outside of marriage, normally heterosexual. In secular Greek usage, it often meant prostitution.

moichos (9) - adulterer (ie sexual activity where at least one partner is married to someone else)

malakos (9) - a soft or effeminate man: the presumption is that he is the receptive partner in a same-sex relationship (and not merely excluded for effeminate mannerisms or fussy dress-sense!) Widely used in Greek literature. Not sure on what grounds NRSV translates “male-prostitutes”; NIV does the same.

arsenokoitos (9) - a word probably invented by Jewish commentators (or perhaps Paul himself) on the basis of Leviticus 18 & 20. arsin = adult male; koite = bed, act of sleeping. Presumably a distinction with malakos is intended, in which case the most likely nuance is that it refers to the penetrating partner.

NRSV’s “sodomites” is an interesting but unfortunate translation, which associates this instance with whatever happened at Sodom; but of course, that connection was made by the translators, not Paul. Likewise NIV’s “homosexual offenders”, which might imply that Paul allows for non-offensive homosex. The word “offender” is made up by the NIV translators. You can understand why the RSV and GNB bottle out, and simply render both words as “homosexual perverts”. You may object to the derogatory tone, but I think we can accept that Paul probably took such a view.

Notes:

A: Paul is using many of the same words he used in 5.10-11. The main new element is the words referring to homosex.

B: Paul acknowledges that several of the Corinthians had practised such vices, but that now they have ceased from doing so, through their baptism and the Holy Spirit.

C: He uses the language of cleansing, connecting with his application of purity language to moral behaviour under the New Covenant.

D: It's sometimes argued that the vice-list takes a turn from sexual misdeeds to economic ones, and that the "gay" terms are on the economic side of that watershed. Thus they would be condemned because they refer to sex-for-money. If this is so, then non-commercial homosex would be acceptable. This argument depends on where the switch comes between sexual vices and economic ones: which is a matter for speculation. And it also supposes you can confirm that the subsequent vices are indeed economic ones. But being covetous or a drunkard or a slanderer aren't entirely convincing as economic vices. In fact the word translated slanderer may just mean someone who uses foul language. So, nice try, but it probably doesn't prove that malakoi and arsenokoitai are male prostitutes. I think we're safer to suppose that they're general terms.

E: In Romans 1, these vices were symptomatic of rebellion against God and his wrath. Here Paul goes further and warns that they will bar us from the kingdom of God. This applies every bit as much to the other vices listed as to homosex, and should be a chastening thought for every last one of us.

1 Timothy 1.9-11

"This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me." (NRSV)

Key word:

arsenokoitos again.

Notes:

A: Again this word is included in a variety of serious vices which can affect people of all sexual orientations.

B: These vices are against the law (probably = the Torah)

C: For Paul (or ...) That Law is still deemed relevant and effective for holding these vices in check.

D: All of these vices are not only contrary to sound teaching (10) but incompatible with the Gospel (11)

Summary

Our consideration of homosex in the Bible needs to be set in the context of the broader teaching of the Bible on sexuality and marriage.

We looked in detail at three Old Testament and three New Testament passages that speak explicitly of homosex. In all of them it is portrayed negatively.

In the Old Testament Homosex is condemned as an abomination, unclean and a capital crime.

In the New Testament it is considered against nature (ie against God's created order), and impure; it constitutes a bar to entry into the kingdom of heaven, and it is against the Law, against sound teaching and incompatible with the Gospel.

We noted in passing that it is a sin alongside many others which are generally condemned just as strongly as same-sex sexual activity.

It would be very hard to argue on the basis of this material that the Bible (or the New Testament) has a trajectory or meta-narrative which would approve of homosex. Some gay Christians seek to reinterpret this biblical material, but most accept that the Bible's teaching is uncomfortably plain. So other gay Christians seek ways to override the biblical material, whilst not denying that the Bible clearly condemns "homosex".

Because of the uniform position of both Testaments, such "revisionist" approaches have failed to win the arguments in the major Christian Churches. This is why Christians cannot conduct, condone or commend any same-sex sexual activities, or equate such relationships with marriage.

We shall come back to the Church's position on homosex later in the morning.

However, it must be stated that we are all sinners, regardless of our sexual orientation, and that God treats us all with grace and compassion. People with Same-sex attraction should be treated with respect, grace and kindness. Experiencing same-sex attraction isn't a sin. But as with all sins against God's standards, sexual immorality (gay or straight) needs to lead to repentance, forgiveness and amendment of life.

ATTITUDES TO SEXUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Increasingly attitudes towards sexuality have ceased to be moral issues and have instead become issues of individual civil rights. As Eckman says in "Biblical Ethics" "what was unthinkable a few decades ago, gradually became debatable and is now fast becoming acceptable." Nearly as many children are being born outside marriage as within it (around 40%) and same sex marriage is now enshrined within the legal systems of a number of European countries including the UK and France.

This fundamental shift is mainly due to the focus on individual rights within society, as opposed to individual obligations towards society as a whole and the rise of postmodern culture with its denial of absolute truth and values.

The removal of the Judeo Christian tradition (and indeed any system of absolute moral values) has left each individual to evaluate his own behaviour. Anything that is legal goes and if it isn't legal today then the cry is usually for it to be made legal tomorrow – as with same sex marriage. Once we take away an absolute moral standard, people are left to evaluate their own behaviour – which is all equally moral because it is all equally legal. This means that it effectively becomes immoral – and is becoming illegal – to express any kind of intolerance or challenge *any* legally protected behaviour or opinion. We'll look at that in more detail in a minute.

In my view this confusion between what is legal and what is moral and the emergence of tolerance as the supreme virtue is the most important issue being debated today as regards our

sexual behaviour. In many ways this is not new. Plato predicted that democracy would crumble because a foolish majority would turn liberty into license (Republic 562-565). Even earlier the book of Judges laments the chaos which resulted when:

“In those days; everyone did as he saw fit.” (Judges 21:25 NIV)

rather than doing what was right in God’s eyes:

“..... ” listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, ” (Exodus 15:26 NIV)

To an extent this has grown out of the commendable attempts to protect women and minorities. Almost no one today would argue that one’s skin colour or sex was relevant to one’s civil rights – but how does this apply in relation to homosexuality, or incest, or paedophilia? Well, it depends on whether these things are something that you simply *are* (like being handicapped or female) or whether they are something you *do* (like adultery or incest).

I think very few people, even today, would agree that incest, adultery or polygamy were not both voluntary and wrong. We don’t say “let them be that’s just the way they are” – generally we condemn and (at least in the case of incest in most countries) legally prosecute the offenders. But, what about paedophilia and homosexuality? Well, as we shall see later, paedophilia appears to be significantly related to neurological and endocrine abnormalities (although there remains a substantial element of choice) and homosexuality appears to have an element of genetic causality, although there is absolutely no specific gay gene or group of genes. Genetic linkage in homosexuality is weak and, as we shall see, such linkage is not key and the element of choice predominates. Very few experts regard either homosexuality or paedophilia as completely biologically driven. The gay lobby often seeks to have the best of both worlds by arguing in public that homosexuality is driven by unchangeable and irresistible biological factors and yet stressing ‘gay choice’ in private. In spite of the similarities between homosexuality and paedophilia (elements both of nature and choice), society regards these very differently – although as we shall see in a minute attitudes are beginning to change.

I think the difference in public opinion can largely be related to a biased portrayal of homosexuality by the media as something you simply are – which is untrue – and paedophilia as something you simply do – which is also untrue.

We shall be returning to the debate about nature or choice later. But whatever the conclusion (and it will be that homosexuality has a significant component of choice as does paedophilia and that the two have substantial linkage) we need to look at the issue of damage to society as a whole.

The fact is that all forms of sexual activity outside marriage are damaging to society as a whole. Heterosexual sex outside marriage has raised the numbers of children born outside wedlock. In the UK some 30% of children under the age of 17 live with only one of their parents. According to official US statistics, in the US children born out of wedlock are almost half (41%) of the total of all births and around 89% of all births out of wedlock are to teenage parents. The cost to society is immense, 80% of such parents end up in dependence on welfare. Apart from the financial costs of supporting these single parent mothers, children raised in such circumstances are far more likely to be criminals, become habitual drug users or alcoholics, to have mental health problems and to themselves have children out of wedlock. According to the Heritage Foundation, over 90% of such children will fall into one

or more of these categories. This is an enormous knock on cost effect, both in financial and human terms.

Couples simply cohabiting or living together are not equivalent to marriage. The fact is that unmarried couples are far more likely to break up than married couples, presumably the extra commitment involved in marriage somehow acts as a 'glue' to stabilise and maintain the relationship. Recently, it's been shown that our brains respond differently to our opposite sex partners when we are married as compared to the way they respond to opposite sex partners when we are not married. When we're married our brains show much more confidence in our partners and show that we derive more comfort from them. Governments should act to promote marriage as opposed to cohabitation, but at the moment the UK actively promotes separation of parents. Couples moving in together can loose more than £7,000 a year in tax credits the moment they move in together – what a counterproductive incentive.

If anything homosexuality is even more damaging. According to US Centre for Disease Control HIV infection rates in the male gay community increased by 20% between 2008 and 2010, although infection rates now seem to be stabilising overall, but infection rates are falling amongst young male homosexuals, and continuing to rise in older age groups. Male homosexuals who consistently maintain such a sexual orientation are some 4% of the total population, yet as of the CDC's latest statistics, 56% of *all* HIV infection in the US is within the male homosexual community. Gay and bisexual adults are the only group in which the rate of HIV infection is not declining. The problem is by no means limited to HIV/AIDS. Male homosexuals are also highly likely to suffer from other sexually transmitted diseases, viral infections and hepatitis. Male homosexuals have a 75% lifetime incidence rate for STD's as against some 17% for the general population. They are also over 17 times more likely to suffer from cancer. Penetrative anal sex is clearly fraught with health issues. What a cost in terms of the financial cost of medical treatment and the knock on risks for those with whom such individuals come into contact. So called "safe sex" campaigns are having little effect in stemming the rising tide of infections.

Come into contact with others these male homosexuals almost certainly will. Stable homosexual relationships between partners who remain faithful to each other are not at all the norm. The study of M T Sagar and E Robins found that 50% of male homosexuals over the age of 30 and 75% of such over the age of 40 experienced *no* stable relationship which lasted more than a year. Another large study by K Jay and A Young found that 38% of male homosexuals had never been in a relationship that lasted more than a year and 55% had never been in a relationship that lasted more than two years. A recent study by L Linn et al on 'Recent Sexual Behaviour Among Homosexual Men' found that male homosexuals averaged over 20 different partners per year. In a recent survey (Homosexualities, Bell & Weinberg) 43% of male homosexuals stated that they had more than 500 different partners, 28% admitted to more than 1,000 partners and 83% said they had had more than 50 partners.

If we project these figures it is clear that the number of homosexual men who experience anything like lifetime fidelity is so small as to be statistically meaningless. Promiscuity amongst male homosexuals is not merely a stereotype and it is not merely the majority experience – it is virtually the *only* experience. When male homosexuals are held up as being "faithful" or "committed", it doesn't mean what you might imagine. It means that the couple are relatively committed to staying together (although even that is often a fairly short term matter), but not that their sexual activity will be restricted to their "partner" alone. The new same sex marriage laws in the UK don't include a concept of adultery, partly because it's

difficult to define for homosexuals, but adultery is a largely meaningless concept for most sexually active homosexual men.

Most tragically surveys show that the most promiscuous male homosexuals are the least likely to take precautions and are the least likely to inform prospective partners if they have HIV or other infection.

Male homosexuality is also strongly linked with drug and substance abuse and alcohol abuse. The linkage is at its strongest amongst the most promiscuous group of male homosexuals.

Another problem is the number of homosexuals who prefer to have sex with young boys rather than adult males, or who like both. Approximately 80% of reported paedophilic victims in the US are boys who are molested by adult males. It is impossible to know precisely the number of male paedophiles, but they are thought to be some 10% of male homosexuals. Paedophilia is a far greater problem amongst homosexuals than amongst heterosexuals, at least in the US. Statistics indicate that one third of all offences are being committed by male homosexuals who form only some 4% of the total population.

Allowing homosexuals to marry does not enable them to procreate children. Children almost certainly contribute massively to the stability of marriages, not merely as guilt laced glue, but because they are vital elements in the construction of families. Same sex marriage also completely fail to address the problem of paedophilia. And what about children adopted into same sex marital relationships – recent studies indicate that they are highly likely to be disadvantaged in many ways? As we shall see in a moment early childhood experiences affect our sexuality as adults. Adopting children into same sex marriages can only create more adults unable to form normal heterosexual relationships.

Furthermore, what about the rights of freedom of speech and conscience for those who oppose same sex marriages. It is becoming increasingly clear that we can either have special rights for homosexuals and other minority groups or freedom of speech, but not both. A UK Christian prison worker has been debarred for quoting a scripture which references homosexuality. It's increasingly becoming an offence to quote the Bible in public. Hundreds of legal cases have been brought in Canada against those unable to endorse same sex marriage. A couple of years ago Quebec announced the world's first anti-gay hate register where the names of supposed offenders are anonymously reported and denounced. In both Canada and the UK anyone speaking out is insulted or threatened – Foster parents, adoption agencies, B&B owners and counsellors have already been affected and in some cases penalised. There is the very worrying case of a street preacher in Scotland arrested in 2010 and detained for saying that homosexuality is a sin. In education UK parents are not able to withdraw their children from mandatory endorsement (or even promotion) of gay marriage. The Christian Concern website has more information and details.

Finally where (if anywhere) does all this come to a halt? Earlier we mentioned polygamy, well let me tell you that according to the New York Times, Utah polygamist K Brown has successfully challenged polygamy laws in Utah. Polygamous immigrant wives have been admitted into both Canada and the UK and are already receiving benefits there. We can go further, what about multiple loves – often manifesting as triangular bisexual relationships – known as polyamory. Such triangular relationships have been registered in Brazil and in Canada common law polyamory is now recognised as valid and lawful. Canada today, why not Europe tomorrow?

To go even further what about consensual adult incest? We shall today consider incest with children to be a form of paedophilia and in this context it is worth noting that perhaps one third of all cases of child abuse occur within families. In the film “Yellow” Hollywood’s Nick Cassavetes defends incest by equating it with gay rights and marriage. In court, Columbia professor David Epstein appealed to gay rights to justify a sexual relationship with his daughter. Gay writer Johann Hari asks “ has a window opened for ‘safe’ incest? And, if so, is our visceral disgust just a remnant from a vanishing age?” On the internet Yahoo answers proclaims consensual incest in which the rights of all parties are respected to be “a good thing” and a number of countries including Switzerland are considering legalising consensual incest. The European Court of Human Rights has recently ruled that laws permitting incest in Spain and Portugal are justified.

Lastly, what about paedophiles or ‘minor attracted people – MAP’s’ as they are becoming known? The World Health Organisation says that paedophilia now appears to be classed as an orientation. Paedophiles have a website B4U-ACT which advocates “understanding” and “acceptance” for paedophiles. We can only hope that a public backlash in the wake of the Jimmy Saville affair and other similar scandals will change public opinion radically in other countries as well as the UK, although the lack of action by the authorities in relation to the grooming of under age children in Rochdale gives me serious doubts. If the authorities will not act, how long will it be before we’re forced into legal recognition and acceptance of this perversion?

As I said at the beginning, once moral boundaries have been removed anything goes.

I believe that society as a whole has been hoodwinked by the gay community and those promoting a liberal view of heterosexual relationships, and indeed sexual relationships generally, into putting individual rights first, over and above the rights of society as a whole. As Christians we are called to give up some of our individual rights for the good of society as a whole. To put it another way, Christians are called to a life of sacrifice following in the footsteps of Jesus.

SEXUALITY: A MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE

We’ve already looked at some relevant material in our consideration of the attitudes of society. We’ve seen the immense damage done to both individuals and society as a whole both by heterosexual sex outside the framework of marriage and by homosexual practices.

I think the issues involved in heterosexual sex are fairly well accepted and clear. Bringing up children outside the framework of a stable family involving two parents of both genders is damaging to the parents and immensely damaging to the children concerned. We’ve already looked at some of the relevant statistics in our session on attitudes in current society.

When we turn to homosexuality the position is somewhat different. Again we’ve seen in our previous section just how damaging medically male homosexual practices are. I don’t find this surprising. A moment’s consideration will tell us that the male body is not well adapted to have sex with another male. For obvious reasons I’m not going to go into the details of precisely why this should be the case today – but it certainly and demonstrably is the case. It will also be surprising if bringing up children in a non-heterosexual environment is not damaging – although such relationships are still too new for us to have reliable firm evidence.

But, we are told by the gay lobby that it is simply their nature to be homosexual – they are made that way and they can't help it. Later I'm going to argue that homosexuality is not primarily determined by nature (although genetic and environmental factors do undoubtedly play a part) – but even if it were completely determined by nature that is not a sufficient justification. We could just as easily apply that same argument to violence, substance abuse, racism, paedophilia etc – but we do not because generally we recognise that an *explanation* for behaviour is not a *justification* for it.

So, a paedophile might claim that it would be '*unnatural*' for him to seek a meaningful sexual relationship with an adult, or a nymphomaniac might claim it was '*unnatural*' to limit herself to a single male partner. But this has nothing to do with a justification for their behaviour or for any moral foundation for it, and it is in this moral sense that Paul uses the word *natural* in Romans chapter 1 when he says that homosexuality is not *natural* – Giles has already addressed that issue. In the moral sense *natural* refers to something which accords with God's intention and design. Cannibalism may be *natural* to those who practice it, but that does not make it *natural* in the moral sense that it conforms to God's will for humankind. What is *natural* to human experience or desire is not necessarily *natural* in God's moral design.

In this section we are considering the *naturalness* of homosexual behaviour and paedophilic behaviour, not in the moral sense but in the sense of asking whether it arises out of natural circumstances largely beyond the control of the individual or whether it is mainly a matter of choice.

One justification often offered for the naturalness of homosexuality is that it occurs in the animal kingdom. Numerous studies of the animal kingdom reveal male on male mounting behaviour – usually to express roles of dominance and submission – but there are no known reports of long term animal homosexual bonding. Some monkeys and apes engage in male on male fondling, but this does not continue into maturity when heterosexual options are available. No primates or other animals are exclusively homosexual when heterosexual options are available.

Throughout history no society of which we have knowledge has ever approved of long term homosexual relationships between adults. In the classical Greek period and during the dominion of the Roman Empire, many men did turn to young men in the 12 to 17 year old age group for sexual gratification – with the young boy always playing the passive female role. But these were not long term relationships, nor were the active partners exclusively homosexual, indeed they were generally heads of households involving one or more wives.

The media has given much attention to attempts to identify homosexual behaviour with certain brain structure, hormones or genes. But there is no reputable scientific evidence for such associations. Indeed the recent evidence is greatly against such associations. Tim Spector, Professor of Genetic Epidemiology at King's College London, recently published results of the largest ever meta study of studies of identical twins. He concludes that around 70 per cent of identical male twins do not develop the same homosexual preferences as each other. He concludes that this alone shows that genes are not enough to make anyone homosexual. He also states that there is significant evidence of sexual changeability – he says that there are cases of men who become homosexual after strokes and there are cases of men who change sexual identity up to several times a day (known as alternating gender

incongruity). He concludes that choice and early life experiences are probably the key factors, although he does also conclude that once a choice for homosexuality has been made, males rarely revert to preferring females after puberty. This is in contrast to female homosexuals who normally swing back and forth in their sexual preferences throughout much of their lives. As with male homosexuals, studies of identical twins indicate that female homosexuality is only around 25-30 per cent heritable. Nevertheless, in spite of Tim Spector's comments on male homosexuals, we must note that the term seems to cover a broad spectrum of behaviour and desire. Some are solely attracted to members of the same sex, whilst many others, perhaps even a majority, describe themselves as "bi-sexual" or "bi-curious". This suggests that for many "gay" men, heterosexual attraction remains a possibility. Studies indicate that our sexuality is rarely completely black or white.

Other studies have arrived at similar conclusions to those of Tim Spector. Johns Hopkins Hospital in a 2016 study confirms that homosexuality is not genetically determined, but finds that environment is a significant factor. Francis S Collins, head of the human genome project says that "homosexuality is not hardwired" and that "there is no inescapable component of heritability to many human behavioural traits. For virtually none of them is heredity ever close to predictive." He goes on to say that "whatever genes are involved represent predispositions, not predeterminations." Kirk et al in their study of Australian twins report an estimated factor of heritability of no more than 30% in relation to male homosexuality. As I said earlier there is no gay gene or group of genes or other identifiable hormonal, biochemical or structural factor. If there were, then the percentage of heritability would be far higher. More probably genetic factors act on hormones or other biochemical elements (in persons with the appropriate and certainly complex combinations of genes) to incline a person towards homosexuality, but they absolutely do not compel such an inclination. A 2006 study of two million Danes concludes that childhood family experiences are important, which is another reason for concluding that children need to be brought up in stable families comprising two parents of opposite genders.

All these studies indicate that genetically determined factors do play a *limited* role in male homosexuality, but these genes only incline individuals towards homosexual behaviour. They absolutely do not compel such behaviour.

There are indications that fine brain structure features in adults can be identified with male homosexuality, but we know that fine brain structure is modified by learning and other life experiences. Thus, given the lack of heritability in homosexuality, it appears much more likely that such brain structure differences are the result of homosexual behaviour rather than the cause of such behaviour.

One might expect that studies such as those referred to above would not be welcome in the gay community, but this is not altogether true. Many gay activists welcome studies indicating genetic or other biological linkage for their effect on public opinion, but are philosophically committed to personal choice as opposed to *any* kind of deterministic theory. Darrel Yates Rist, cofounder of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation writes: "In the summer of 1991, the journal *Science* reported anatomical differences between the brains of homosexual and heterosexual men. [incidentally that's a study which on the basis of further analysis has now been rejected] The euphoric media – those great purveyors of cultural myths – drove the story wildly. Reporters seized on the renewed presumption that we humans are not responsible for our sexual choices any more than for whatever else we choose to do, that we are chromosomally driven to everything. But

[Le Vay's work], like all such research, is a futile attempt to convince people who intuitively know better that under no circumstances can our children be lured by queer ideas if the urge is not embedded in their brains from birth.

In the end, science may well discover to describe the intricate play of genes and environment that entices any of us to make the subtle choices throughout our lives that lead us to our particular expressions, sexual or otherwise, in a conformity-laden culture. Fine. Ultimately, though, it seems to me cowardly to abnegate our individual responsibility for the construction of our sexual desires. Rather, refusing the expedient lie and insisting instead on the right to fulfil ourselves affectionately – in whatever direction our needs compel us, however contrary to the social norm they may be – is both honest and courageous, an act of utter freedom.”

Of course, Rist also contends that we are all essentially bisexual and that heterosexuals hide behind biological causation to ward off our own homoerotic fantasies. But clearly homosexuals do not themselves embrace and believe in inescapable biological causation for their sexual orientation.

So what of early life experiences noted by Tim Spector? The most common theories focus on disturbances in the parent child relationship during the first few years of life. The classical theory is that every child moves towards the parent of the opposite sex and the inevitable frustration of that desire leads the child to resolve the conflict by turning to the same sex parent. The theory goes that for homosexuals something goes wrong with the same sex parent relationship and the individual remains in sexual immaturity desiring the same sex and often hostile towards the opposite sex. I doubt that this is a complete explanation, research results are inconsistent and many individuals fail to fit the theory. Indeed some scholars have recently chosen the egg over the chicken, maintaining that parents *react* to pre-homosexual children of the same sex as that parent by becoming distant and ineffective. Such theories may be a part of the explanation, but they are certainly not the complete answer.

The moral environment of the family in which the child is reared may also have significant influence – there is little research here except to show that sexual abuse during childhood is a very significant factor in engendering homosexuality. Male children sexually abused during childhood are more than seven times more likely to become homosexual than those who have not been so abused.

If any theories of early life experiences as causal factors are correct then we can take this as being very significant in the argument for the importance of normal two gender parent families living together as a family unit.

Some who object to the extremes of biological and social theorists and indeed, as we have seen, many homosexuals themselves argue that homosexuality is purely and simply a matter of individual choice. Certainly there comes a point in time when an individual must choose whether or not to have sex with another person. Sexual desire is not so strong as to be an absolute compulsion. Additionally some individuals may choose to engage in homosexual acts when deprived of heterosexual partners (for example whilst imprisoned) without becoming long term homosexuals.

A person who chooses to leave the *normal* path of heterosexual monogamy may find many paths that lead to sexual gratification. Some of these have never desired intimacy with members of the opposite sex and do desire such intimacy with members of the same sex. Let

us, for the sake of argument, call this a *homosexual orientation*. Nevertheless this homosexual orientation does not define who or what a person is and more than a heterosexual orientation does. It is neither obligatory nor necessarily morally desirable to indulge our sexual orientation. Our sexual orientation is not identical to our *being*. Sexual desire and the gratification of our sexual desires is neither central nor necessary to our being. Our sexual orientation does not determine what we have a *right* to do or what we *must* do as an expression of our being.

So what can be done about homosexuality? Can therapy or other treatment change sexual orientation? In the past twenty years the position of the American Psychiatric Association has changed from the initial position that homosexuality was a mental disorder, to the position that it is only a disorder when the subject does not want it, to the present position that it is never a disorder. Studies of the effectiveness of therapy for homosexuals vary. An organisation of US psychiatrists (NARTH) reports success rates of 30-50% for long term significant change. Masters and Johnson studied a small group of individuals highly motivated to change and found a 55-70% success rate. Other more recent studies report success rates similar to those experienced for treatment of substance abuse. Many programmes (following a similar philosophy to AA) refuse to keep statistics. Of course, this assumes that it will remain legal to practice such conversion therapy. In the UK a motion to ban such therapy was proposed by a Labour MP in December 2013 in the UK Parliament as a Private Members Bill. Recently a Christian Counsellor was dismissed for offering therapy to male homosexuals who had expressed a desire to change their orientation. For those who wish to adhere to Christian moral values and have what we've called a 'homosexual orientation' celibacy is the only real option and is the course taken by many practising Christians.

In conclusion I think we can say from a medical and scientific perspective that it is not completely clear what causes homosexuality and it is also not clear as to whether it can or should be treated – but there is no doubt that homosexuality is damaging to society and should certainly not be encouraged. From the Christian perspective we also condemn it morally whilst wishing to love, embrace and encourage change in those who are of a homosexual orientation.

In contrast with homosexuality, paedophilia is still generally regarded as a psychiatric disorder – in spite of the worrying trends I cited earlier. Fortunately it is also defined by most legal systems (including that of the US) as a criminal act. There is actually debate in the psychiatric community about exactly what constitutes paedophilia, but for our purposes today I'm going to take it to mean a desire to seek sexual gratification with children of either sex. Many studies have associated such behaviour with low IQ and sub-normal physical stature – but these characteristics are not compelling (having an association rate of around 20-25%).

Most experts currently view this as a sexual orientation not easily or usually subject to change after puberty and estimate that it occurs in some 1-5% of men. Thus it is probably at least as prevalent as homosexuality. Victims are often family members with the abusers and about one third of abusers were themselves subject to abuse as children or young adults. As we might expect that atheist idiot Richard Dawkins says in an interview published in The Times Magazine (September 7th 2013) that mild paedophilia does not cause harm – in contrast with most experts and most evidence from studies.

As with studies on homosexuality, there appear to be weakly linked genetic factors and a degree of social or environmental causation which is difficult to determine. The conclusion must be that like homosexuality this is largely a chosen behaviour which is not completely compelled by genetics or other factors and thus stands to be condemned. Treatment statistics are even less hopeful than those for homosexuality and in the case of violent repeat offenders strong drug treatment (chemical castration) or in extreme cases long term imprisonment is the only answer.

THE POSITION OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

1. The “Anglican Church”.

At Holy Trinity we delight to include people from a very wide variety of Christian traditions and denominations. But we are unashamedly Anglican, and part of the Church of England. The Anglican Communion is made up of largely autonomous churches in lots of countries, usually in areas where people of British origin have lived or worked, or where mainly British missionaries have planted churches.

All of those churches would have certain broad similarities in their structures and style of worship, and would recognise one another’s members and welcome them to the Lord’s Table without quibble. They would value their historical connections with the Church of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and their bishops would attend the 10-yearly Lambeth Conference. There are one or two “Instruments of Unity”, like the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) or the Primates’ Conference. But the Anglican Communion isn’t set up like the Roman Church. The Archbishop isn’t a Pope and there’s no Vatican or Curia. The more modest attempt to agree an “Anglican Covenant” has failed to get off the ground.

So when we talk about human sexuality, the position of the Anglican Church can be stated in general terms, but there are often wide, and sometimes irreconcilable, differences between different churches within the Communion.

The current position of the Anglican Communion was defined at the 1998 Lambeth Conference, with Resolution 1.10. It goes like this:

This Conference:

- commends to the Church the subsection report on human sexuality;
- in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;
- recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;
- while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;

- cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;
- requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us;
- notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality and the concerns expressed in resolutions IV.26, V.1, V.10, V.23 and V.35 on the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring process.

That is still the official position of the Anglican Communion as a whole.

Before we focus in on the Church of England, just a couple of extra points.

This view of sexuality and sexual behaviour is broadly in line with the historic position of most major Christian denominations: protestant, catholic and orthodox. However, none of the issues we're discussing today are purely Anglican problems: the same pressures and questions face Christians across the world, most especially in the western world. Many protestant churches have already adopted more "liberal" approaches to these matters than the Anglican Communion. In Roman Catholicism, the official line is strongly traditional, but homosexuality among catholic priests is not unheard of...

The more conservative evangelical and charismatic churches are not immune to such inconsistencies either: but their debates are usually less public than in the Anglican Church.

2. The Historical Position of the Church of England.

We now look at the particular part of the Anglican Church to which we belong, the Church of England.

The foundational documents of the Church of England and its internal law (the Canons) are quite clear that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and a woman. Sex outside of marriage was seen as sinful and highly inappropriate for Christians.

There would have been times when the Church of England would probably have taken a very strong line against practising homosexuals, but for most of my lifetime a gentler and more pastoral approach has been the order of the day.

The 1998 Lambeth resolution probably reflects the mood and teaching of the Church of England in the second half of the 20th Century: recognising those with Same-sex attraction, condemning homophobic attacks, but not condoning "homosex" (the phrase I used earlier).

The official position of the Church was defined by General Synod in 1987 with Resolution GS700. It resolved:

1. that sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship;
2. that fornication and adultery are sins against this ideal, and are to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion;
3. that homosexual genital acts also fall short of this ideal, and are likewise to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion;
4. that all Christians are called to be exemplary in all spheres of morality, and that holiness of life is particularly required of Christian leaders.

This was passed with near unanimity, and remains the official position of the C of E.

3. The pressure to conform.

However: since those two resolutions were passed, wider British society has been increasingly exposed to LGBT movements, and a far more tolerant attitude to homosexual practice has become the official norm. Witness the British government sending tax-payers' money to fund gay protests in Russia, or the IMF blocking loans to Uganda because of its anti-gay laws. Pressure from gay groups within and outside the church, within and outside the UK, have meant that the issue is constantly being brought back onto the Church's agenda.

The Church of England has responded to Lambeth 1.10's recommendation that the issue should continue to be studied. Most dioceses have set up Human Sexuality Study Groups: I was a member of the one in Guildford Diocese. The House of Bishops have commissioned several reports and discussion documents on the subject:

- * Issues in Human Sexuality (1991)
- * Some Issues in Human Sexuality (2003)
- * The House of Bishops' Pastoral Statement on Civil Partnerships (2005)

All of these explored the increasingly divergent views on homosexuality within the Church and wider society, and called for compassion and understanding for those with Same-sex attraction. But all of them maintained the official teaching of the Church of England.

However, developments in the wider Anglican Communion were adding to the problems: The Welsh archbishop Rowan Williams was appointed to be Archbishop of Canterbury, despite having written books favouring same-sex sexual relationships.

He attempted to install his openly gay friend Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading which nearly split the Church of England, and Jeffrey John had to withdraw.

In 2003, the Episcopal Church in America consecrated Gene Robinson as bishop. Robinson is an openly gay man cohabiting with his same-sex partner (after having divorced his wife). This was seen as a provocative act by most Anglicans worldwide, defying Lambeth 1.10, and threatening to tear the Communion apart. This led to deep divisions among Anglicans, and for instance the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Churches broke off ecumenical relations with the Anglican Church because of it (for a time).

When the 2008 Lambeth Conference was being planned, many traditionalist Anglican bishops from the two-thirds world were appalled that the American Episcopal Church was still invited and heavily represented, despite refusing to back down or apologise over the Gene Robinson affair. As Rowan Williams was plainly siding with the small Episcopal Church against the resolutions of the "Instruments of Communion", several hundred bishops boycotted the Lambeth Conference and organised an alternative (Gafcon) in Jerusalem instead.

Meanwhile in the UK, Civil Partnerships were brought into law, with the Lords Spiritual naively believing the New Labour government's assurances that this would not lead to same-sex marriage.

4. The latest developments.

Fearful of appearing to be out of touch with the way British society appears to be moving, the House of Bishops commissioned another report on the subject, headed by a former Whitehall mandarin Sir Joseph Pilling. It's become known as the Pilling Report, although its official title is "Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality".

It should be stated that it's a discussion document requested by the bishops (not the Church as a whole). So the Pilling Report is important, but it doesn't have any authority to dictate or change the Church's doctrine.

The Report was published at the end of November 2013.

It's surprisingly frank in admitting that it doesn't have much new to add to the previous documents, but its conclusions and recommendations have been very controversial.

It believes that there's not enough biblical or theological material to alter the current teaching of the Church of England, but feels that this teaching doesn't have any solid foundation either. So it recommends that we should all go away and discuss again it in our parishes and dioceses.

Needless to say, this doesn't satisfy either traditionalists or revisionists. The pro-gay lobby feel it's a nasty bit of anti-gay prejudice. If there's no reason to uphold the traditional position of homosex and same-sex marriage, why on earth would you uphold such a position?

The conservative view is that it severely underplays the substantial theological and biblical basis for the Church of England's position, and asks us to have yet more discussions for no valid reason.

The House of Bishops met to discuss the report at the end of January, and basically said they couldn't agree on the Pilling report. It is a deeply flawed document. So the bishops said the Church's doctrine of marriage remains, but they commended the Pilling Report to the Church for wider study.

Meanwhile, the leaders of the more traditional Gafcon Anglican Churches expressed their dismay at Pilling. Conversely, the archbishops of Canterbury and York reprimanded Ugandan and Nigerian Anglicans for holding a conservative stance. This wasn't appreciated, and probably made the disintegration of the Anglican Communion even closer.

The House of Bishops issued a Statement in February on a related matter: the advent of Same-Sex Marriage in the UK this month. Again the bishops say that the Church's understanding of marriage, and its Canon law on marriage, remains unaltered. No marriage services or formal blessing ceremonies will be permitted for same-sex couples. But in trying to moderate between the revisionist and conservative lobbies, their statement has again left all sides unhappy.

For instance, revisionists are angry that clergy with Same-sex attraction are required to live in celibacy, and same-sex couples can't marry in church. This is supposed to set an example of Christian living, but not an example that anyone else is supposed to follow!

On the other hand, lay Christians with same-sex attraction who wish to live in celibacy and chastity feel the Church has not taken their costly commitment seriously. "It costs us a lot to follow the Church's teaching, but you're saying we needn't have bothered."

Those who are theologically conservative believe the Church's teaching has been seriously watered down, and lament that there is now no call to repentance from those who have engaged in sinful behaviour. Much of the wider Anglican Communion looks on with dismay: it confirms their fears that the Church of England is cutting itself adrift from Scripture, tradition and the larger part of the Anglican Communion. In conversations with Roman Catholics here in Cannes, they are convinced that Anglicans have adopted a deeply unchristian position.

The media have enjoyed watching the Church getting into another muddle, appearing neither conservative enough, nor sufficiently PC.

And God? I suspect he may be remembering of Jesus' words in Mark 7: "You put aside God's command and obey human teachings.... You reject God's law in order to uphold your own teaching."

5. Where does that leave us?

As the bishops keep telling us, officially nothing has changed. And we shall not be altering our teaching or practice on these matters here in Cannes.

At Holy Trinity we shall continue to abide by the official Anglican teachings and guidelines, as we find them in Scripture, the historic formularies, the Canons, and the resolutions GS700 and Lambeth 1998 1.10.

We shall follow the Bishop's directives that same-sex marriages and civil partnerships should not be accompanied by Christian wedding services or "services of blessing". We shall ensure that people with same-sex attraction are welcomed and treated with courtesy and respect, and we shall oppose all violence against LGBT people. But as with any kind of sin, we shall attempt gently but clearly to urge people to repent and seek forgiveness. We shall continue to teach and uphold Scripture as our supreme authority in these matters.

CONCLUSION

Well today we've taken a wide ranging look at human sexuality – always bearing in mind our Christian perspective.

We've seen that Christianity only permits and recognises as good sexual relationships within the context of marriage – that's heterosexual, monogamous marriage. Within that context Christianity pronounces sexuality as good both for procreation of children and the mutual pleasure and bonding of the married couple.

Christianity condemns heterosexual sex outside marriage, polygamy, polyamory, incest, paedophilia and bestiality. Christianity also condemns homosexual expression of sexuality. This remains the position of the Anglican church. As we've seen there are good medical and social reasons for this Christian condemnation. These condemned forms of sexual expression are damaging both to society and the individuals involved.

Of course this doesn't mean that we condemn the individuals involved in these condemned acts we are all to some extent sinners – we've all looked at men or women to whom we are not espoused in a lustful way. We welcome these sinners into our community in a spirit of embracing them and leading them to repentance and change within the support of a loving Christian community.

At the same time we speak our beliefs and our faith into the world and oppose such matters as same sex marriage, wrongful teaching of sexuality in schools and the legalisation of paedophilia and incest.