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Study Questions

Questions that may be used for group study and personal reflection are included in this booklet.

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SEXUALITY and the BIBLE

The gift God wants
you to know about.

by Peter Brain

SEXUALITY and the BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

1. There can be no more important issue for human beings to explore than how they relate to God and His universe. Theology can be defined as the science of God's relationship with the universe. All Christians are invited to be scientists. In other words we all have the opportunity "to discover God's thoughts after Him". The Theology of the Human Person has two sets of data. The first is God's self revelation that is found within the written Word of God, the Bible. The second is the human person. These data are both important, but theology will always seek to apply God's insights to the human situation. The data of human experience(s) needs to be assessed by the objective truth of God's Word. God's Word will judge human behaviour, endorsing, correcting or rejecting it.
2. To have a clear and objective word from God that is "public domain" - accessible to all people - is what we would expect from a loving God. In this Word, God expresses His love for the human person by setting forth our purpose in being created, the reason for our rebellion, the relationship which He desires to have with us, the commandments by which we are to live and the consequences of obedience and disobedience. To possess such a Word puts all humanity in a position of privilege and responsibility. Privilege in that we do not have to grope around in the dark wondering whether there is a God or why we are alive. God has not revealed all there is to know about life and the universe but He has revealed all that we need to know about how to live godly and truly human lives (Deut. 29:29 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17). The responsibility humans have is to listen to that Word, to discover within the pages of the Bible what God's thoughts are, then apply them to life with a humble yet joyful obedience.
3. Human personality in general and sexuality in particular are key issues for all people. It is the conviction of this report that the Bible is neither silent nor ambiguous in what it says about who we are and how we should behave as sexual beings. It follows that the scriptures must sit in judgement upon our behaviour patterns rather than the other way around. Clearly it will be important for us to interpret the

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Bible carefully so we will not be investing an interpretation of scripture with the status of abiding authority. A further conviction of this report is that the Bible has a uniform understanding of sexuality that can be seen clearly throughout its pages. As each passage is taken within its particular context it both confirms and illustrates the uniform theme.

4. Since human sexuality is so much a part of daily life the Biblical teaching is verifiable from the data of human experience. Put another way, the consequences of obedience or disobedience, in the lives of individuals or communities, can be recognised as confirming the Biblical teaching. It is at this point, the crucible of discipleship in the world, that the objective and subjective authority of Holy Scripture combine. This is outlined in the wonderful promise of Romans 12:1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will". This passage serves as a good introduction and basis for this report.

THE HUMAN PERSON

5. Scripture leaves us in no doubt that men and women are "the glory and the scandal of the universe". Here we need scripture to keep us from an unhealthy pessimism or an unrealistic optimism regarding human nature. We are neither to despair over the human condition nor to be arrogant in regard to human achievement. God's revelation of His purposes gives us a unique insight into the dignity and depravity of each person. The first three chapters of Genesis help us make sense of what we observe in the world around and within our hearts. They prepare us for the message contained in the rest of scripture. We discover that we are not the product of chance but the creation of a personal God. Men and women are made in God's image, able to relate to God and one another, given the noble task of managing God's creation for Him and charged with the tasks of continuing the creative work through procreation. All this is in the context of joyful harmony with God and one another (Genesis 1 and 2). This ideal has now been marred. As we experience our world,

indeed our own lives, we find disharmony at every level. The perfection, expressed by God's words "it is very good" and the harmonious picture of Genesis 2 is no longer the experience of human kind. Once again we do not have to speculate as to the reason for this disharmony. Genesis 3 describes for us, in concepts that are easily understood, the rebellion of man and woman against God's right to rule their lives. The consequences of this rebellion which are writ large in human history and every human heart are described for us in the subsequent pages of scripture.

6. The value of the human person to God the Creator is seen throughout scripture as He unfolds His plan of salvation where He graciously invites rebels to repent. The plan is revealed firstly through Abraham, then through a chosen nation Israel, then through God the Son who Himself added humanity to His Divinity in order to make it possible for us to regain our true humanity. God's people, the church, are charged with the privilege and responsibility of making known, through word and example, this great plan. Each person is created in God's image. Sin, however, in separating us from God, means that we need to be reconciled to Him if we are to realise our "true humanity". This is why Jesus spoke of the need for a person to be born again (John 3:3-5, 1 Peter 1:3,23). St Paul's words "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) emphasises the need for each person to be reconciled to God through Christ. To remain unreconciled is to continue as part of the old fallen creation which is under judgement. To turn to Christ is to become part of God's new community. When a person turns to Christ new ways of conduct replace the old. Just as Christ was fully human so men and women mature as they follow Him. Indeed God's Spirit works gradually and surely to transform us into Christ's likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). Every aspect of life is radically changed; this includes our sexuality.

SEXUALITY

7. Genesis 2:24 provides the foundation upon which a clear understanding of sexuality can be built. The words "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh", are quoted by Jesus (Matthew 19:5) and Paul (Ephesians 5:31) and thus alert us to their importance in our

understanding of sexuality. The context, the joyful partnership between Adam and Eve, reminds us that the gender difference and the one flesh sexual act have always been intended by God to be good. Whilst the fall into sin described in Genesis 3 leaves its ugly mark upon every aspect of human nature, sexuality included, there is no hint that the sexual gift is ever to be thought of as anything other than good. The sexual gift is so important and open to such potential for good and harm, that what is implicit in Genesis 2:24 is spelt out in the rest of scripture in the form of commands, exhortation and example. From Genesis 2 it is reasonable to assume that marriage is the proper context for sex and that marriage is to be between a man and a woman. The remainder of the Bible confirms these twin foundations. Nowhere are they set aside, in every place they are upheld. Thus scripture prohibits sex with animals, same gender sex, sex outside of marriage, sex within the family and forced sex (Leviticus 18,19:29). All this is with the view to commending the joyful, considerate, prayerful and thoughtful sexual relationship of a married man and woman (Proverbs 5:18-20; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

8. A brief survey of the Biblical material is instructive and edifying. There are direct commandments that are expressed positively and negatively (Exodus 20:14-17; Proverbs 5:18-21; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Ephesians 5:22-33). The Proverbs set forth the wisdom of avoiding adultery and pursuing faithfulness to one's spouse or future spouse. There is an extended and impassioned exhortation to seek wisdom in Proverbs 5:1- 7:27. It is worth noting that one of wisdoms great benefits is that it leads to discretion and understanding that save us from destructive ways (2:10-15). It is sometimes suggested that the practice of polygamy among the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob and by other Old Testament characters means that there is a second sexual norm in scripture. In reply it should be noted that (a) polygamy is never endorsed in the New Testament or the prophets, where monogamy clearly is the godly pattern, (b) its consequences are mostly disastrous (e.g. David and Solomon) and (c) polygamy is between men and women who are married. Within the pages of scripture are some notable "case studies" of how sexual infidelity leads to ruin. Notable amongst these are the rape of David's daughter Tamar (2 Samuel 13) which followed David's own adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). On the other

hand the faithfulness of Joseph in response to the advances of Potiphar's wife is exemplary (Genesis 39). Joseph demonstrates great resolve which it should be noted began with the conviction that another man's wife is automatically off limits for him. He demonstrates real wisdom in that he minimised the opportunities for her seductive advances in refusing to be with her.

9. The New Testament contains exhortations from the lips of Jesus and the pen of the apostles. Jesus endorses both the 7th and 10th Commandments in Matthew 5:27-28 and in so doing alerts us to the need for reality in maintaining a healthy attitude to sexuality. Sexual infidelity doesn't just happen in bed; indeed it can so easily begin in one's mind. The Lord Jesus knows human nature (something we would expect since He is both God and man). For this reason men and women ought to guard how they think and what they look at (5:29) if they are to be sexually pure. There is no suggestion from this passage that a man who finds a woman attractive is necessarily sinning. Judging from Adam's joyful exclamation when Eve is brought to his side in Eden (Genesis 2:23) there is little doubt that God made men and women to be attracted to one another. The attraction is not the problem, the problem is the sinful propensity of men and women to abuse that attraction. That it can so easily lead to lust and lust to wrong actions is self-evident and accounts for both the 10th Commandment and our Lord's words about lust. It is for this reason that the apostle Paul exhorts Christians to be sexually pure in terms of thoughts, words and actions (Ephesians 4:3-7), whilst nurturing and enjoying familial relationships within the church (1 Timothy 5:1-2).
10. It is important for us to note that sexual intercourse is not necessary in either achieving our real potential as human beings or finding meaning and intimacy in relationships. In other words, a person is a complete person not because they engage in sexual intercourse but because they are created in the image of God. Real relationship with others takes place when respect and mutual consideration are demonstrated. This Christian perspective is vital and must be made crystal clear in our day where society has made an idol of sex. The gift has been invested with the qualities that rightly belong to God the giver. It is for this reason that there is so much confusion, hurt and longing but so little real joy and fulfilment among men and

women in our community.

11. Sex as an end in itself can never deliver the lasting joys it was intended to give when it is expressed outside of its God given context and viewed as a substitute for true relationship with God. That it delivers short term pleasures when engaged in outside of or before marriage is not denied. However, the short term pleasures of the act are no match for the long term joys of the committed marriage relationship built upon mutual respect, service, trust and consideration. When sexual intercourse takes place prior to the public commitment expressed in marriage a false basis for a loving partnership is being established. This is especially so when couples live together prior to marriage, even if it is with the intention of seeing if "we are compatible" or "can live together". Sexual activity, being so powerful and pleasurable, can easily mask the real building blocks of marriage - mutual consideration and respect. No relationship can ever be sustained in a satisfying way for both parties on the basis of genital sex. We were never designed that way. Relationships grow in richer ways. They grow out of the godly characteristics of faithfulness, kindness, communication with words, forgiveness and service. This is why men and women can experience wonderful and meaningful friendships whether they are married or single, young or old and between people of the same or different genders. Unless these characteristics are in place marriage will not blossom as it was intended to. Sex alone cannot produce a fulfilled person or a happy marriage whereas relationship with God, the humble seeking to live according to His ways and the desire to serve others, can produce both.
12. The first Christians lived in a sexually permissive society. It is clear that there was a constant temptation for Christians to adopt the standards of the world around them. The case reported in 1 Corinthians 5 shows just how easy it was for Christians to embrace worldly standards and to deny the high ethic of the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus. The added tragedy in the Corinthian church was that they appeared to be proud rather than sorrowful or repentant.
13. For the apostle the ethical demand always flows from the gospel call. In other words "the gospel is grace and ethics is gratitude". This is the pattern of the New Testament (e.g. Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:1;

Peter 1:13). In the area of sexual purity this is mapped out most clearly in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Here is a general exhortation from the apostle. They were doing well, but since Paul knew of the temptation to impurity given the moral laxity of the day, he urged them to continue to respond to Jesus' Lordship. Their sanctification (growth in Christlikeness) included sexual purity (verse 3). They were to avoid sexual immorality. This word covers every kind of illicit sexual intercourse. It will cover adultery, pre-marital sex, rape and indeed any kind of sexual intercourse outside of the Genesis 2:24 pattern. To engage in such behaviour is to step outside of God's will. God is very gracious in revealing His will for us in this important area of life. He does so because He loves us so much and desires that we might enjoy the sexual gift. He knows the best context for its use, together with the consideration that is most appropriate in the way married couples relate sexually to each other. God's grace is shown in that He gives reasons why we should seek to be sexually pure. Feelings are a poor guide and ally in seeking to be sexually faithful to one's spouse, to one's future spouse and to God. Feelings which can so easily be ruled by passion or lust need to be checked by the clear Word of God. The combination of God's Word and God's Spirit (compare Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16) is very powerful and God's means of keeping His people on track.

The apostle outlines eight reasons for sexual purity in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

14. (i) Jesus' command (v.2) (ii) God's will (v.3), (iii) self-control (v.4) There can be no personal maturity or meaningful society without this fruit of the Spirit. (iv) The distinctive witness of God's people (v.5), (v) For the sake of others - that we do not wrong them (v.6) This will mean the spouses in the case of adultery and the future partners in pre-marital immorality. (vi) God's judgement (v.6). (vii) Response to God's call to holiness of life (v.7) (viii) Because God the Holy Spirit lives within the believer (v.8) Taken together these reasons form a powerful motivation to godly conduct and at the same time remind us of God's good purpose for the sexual gift and our privilege in belonging to Him.
15. A further question remains. Is this ethic for all people, Christian and non-Christian alike? The answer must clearly be, for all people since God is the Creator of all. As Christians we will do well to commend

God's will by speaking where we have opportunity to encourage godly sexual conduct and by living out the Christian ethic, thus demonstrating the wisdom and goodness of God's ways. This may then lead to the opportunity of introducing people to the Creator through Jesus Christ who will then in turn grant them grace and the desire to live for Him. In all our discussion of sexuality the gospel of forgiveness must be dominant. Sexual sin is neither the only nor unforgivable sin. God offers a pardon to all sinners who come humbly. The gospel will not only draw out a response of obedience but is for the purpose of being conformed to Jesus Christ as Lord. God promises and gives strength to all who rely upon Him.

HOMOSEXUALITY

16. When we turn to homosexuality we do so within the context of the importance to God of each human person and the male-female sexual identity bestowed upon humankind as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2. It is upon this basis and the subsequent pattern of teaching in the scriptures that homosexual and lesbian sexual intercourse is to be seen as contrary to God's will for all people in all circumstances. Genesis 2 being creational, is able to judge all cultural expressions of homosexuality and combined with Genesis 1 offers us two fundamental critiques of homosexuality.

- (a) From Genesis 2:24 it does not comply with the male-female context for physical union
- and
- (b) From Genesis 1:27-28 it cannot participate in the procreational purpose.

In discussing Homosexuality we must remember that;

- (i) Homosexual intercourse is not the only sexual intercourse that is considered sinful in scripture (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:10)
- (ii) Sexual sin is by no means the only sin that needs to be taken seriously and dealt with by Christians (e.g. Roman 1:18-32).

- (iii) If there is a tendency to highlight sexual sins above others (e.g. gossip, greed, pride) the solution is found in neither ignoring them all nor treating homosexual intercourse as an exempt or special case.

17. Modern debate hinges upon the question of orientation. Is the homosexual person homosexual by nature or nurture? Whilst it is true that there is no agreement as to the origin of homosexual orientation the Biblical data focuses upon behaviour. Dr William Barclay who wrote with compassion and understanding toward men and women with a homosexual orientation puts this perspective clearly: "from a Biblical point of view, that even if it is impossible to blame a man for being homosexual, it is still necessary to blame him for practising homosexuality". (The Plain Man's Guide to Ethics" p.163) For the apostle this was a matter of supreme importance since behaviour can be repented of, and following a real commitment to Jesus Christ, can be curbed. This change, consequent upon conversion, is described in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Through the power of the gospel people who had offended against God were now living in obedience to Christ by the power of God's Holy Spirit. This transformation will become reality as Christians choose obedience. Stott expresses it clearly when he writes "the true 'orientation' of Christians is not what we are by constitution (hormones) but what we are by choice (heart, mind and will)."

Pastoral issues of great importance follow:

- 18. (a) Forgiveness and strength are gifts that God desires to give all sinners. These life saving gifts are only available however to those who "repent and believe the gospel". When a person becomes committed to Jesus as Lord and Saviour old ways need to be put away so that new ways can flourish. (This is the constant call of scripture e.g. Ephesians 4:17 - 5:21: Romans 12:1-2: John 8:11).
- (b) Our Anglican services reflect this pattern. The General Confession, an opportunity for repentance, comes prior to the declaration of God's forgiveness and grace in the Absolution. Indeed, the various forms of absolution in going beyond the declaration of pardon, to "strengthen you to do His will and keep

you in eternal life" remind us of the Biblical expectation that repentance must lead to reformation and renewal of lifestyle. Nobody is perfect. Christians are at best forgiven sinners who are wholly dependant upon God's grace. Grace however is never cheap. It was established at the price of Christ's atoning death. (1 Peter 1:18- 2:3). No Christian will want to presume upon this grace by continuing in sin. It is for this reason that God has revealed His mind clearly concerning the path of obedience in every area of life including sexual practices. Obedience is required in the form of laws, commands and exhortations but always within the context of grace. God as a gracious Father will strengthen all who seek His pardon through Christ and power through the Holy Spirit. Grace, however, is not automatic. God chooses to work through the gospel which itself requires and indeed evokes the response of repentance and faith.

The verse "To run and work the law demands
Yet gives me neither feet nor hands
But better news the gospel brings
It bids me fly and gives me wings",

reminds us of the liberty and power experienced through the gospel. The law of God in showing us up, drives us to God in repentance and to Christ for pardon and strength. Freedom is the consequence that comes, both from the assurance of acceptance through Christ (Romans 5:1, 8:1) and the power to overcome the bondage of sin, albeit in the context of an ongoing struggle (Romans 6:15-23; 8:9-17).

This struggle, though real and the experience of every Christian, will be the garden bed out of which the fruits of God's Spirit will blossom (Galatians 5:16-26).

John Murray captures the desire of every obedient Christian when he notes that "there is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin, the regenerate in conflict with sin and the unregenerate complacent to sin. It is one thing for sin to live in us, it is another for us to live in sin".

- (c.) This being the case for all Christians in their struggle with every

kind of sin, for the church to fail to call homosexual intercourse a sin is a way of discriminating against homosexual and lesbian people. It is a discrimination of the worst possible kind since it involves a withholding of the means by which God's grace and strength are made available.

The desire to endorse homosexual intercourse between consenting, non-promiscuous faithful partners whilst appearing loving, is in effect an act of sentimentality since it offers false hopes. Whereas the gospel offers pardon and power, the resources and help of the Triune and Living God, to all who repent, the acceptance of homosexual and lesbian practice becomes a means of encouraging a lifestyle that God never intended men and women created in His image to engage in. Such discrimination in denying God's means of grace is at the same time (often unwittingly yet equally seriously) robbing men and women of the means of attaining personal maturity.

- (d) Personal maturity comes by way of facing up to the struggles and trials of life with the help of God. There is no doubt that the person with a homosexual or lesbian orientation who wants to remain true to the guidelines of scripture will find a real and often lonely struggle. In affirming that the way out of the struggle is not to give in to the desire for sexual liaison, the homosexual person will never be the poorer. God has a way of enriching and maturing men and women who remain faithful to Him. This is as true for all people who turn their back on any kind of sinful thought, word or action as for those who face up to any trial or hardship of life with a faithful devotion to God. The scripture is full of promises that assure us of God's good purpose in allowing trials to come our way. (Romans 5:1-5; 8:18-27; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 4:16-18; 12:7-10; James 1:2-8, 12; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

In the book "The Returns of Love" Alex Davidson captures the agony and hope of his personal struggle with homosexuality, "..... the struggle goes on, so that at times when emotion is uppermost I complain bitterly about the cruel Providence which is subjecting me to this incessant tension between law and lust. But when reason takes charge, I realise how much my experience has taught

me, and is still teaching me, about trust in a God who is all love, and who yet for His own very good reasons has seen fit to allow deformity, pain and hardship to continue in this world until the day of the restoration of all things....For unrequited love is a form of suffering and all suffering when invested wisely brings returns. God has promised to heal my body...He hasn't told me if it'll be in this life or after resurrection from the dead. He's promised me that I'll have a perfect body without any pain then. He could heal me today if He wanted to. But I can see why He hasn't done so far. There's people I can help and talk to that you couldn't." Davidson goes on to affirm "a God given comfort in our own affliction (as the apostle Paul puts it) with which we may be able to comfort others in their affliction or in the words of the Master Himself, when the corn of wheat fall into the ground and dies, it produces much fruit."

- (e) There is no indication within the New Testament whether converted homosexuals were able to form heterosexual marriages or not. What is clear, is that pardon flows from God toward the repentant, and power to live faithfully whether as a celibate or married heterosexual is abundantly available. As for all of us, the fellowship of God's people is a powerful supportive factor in assisting godly conduct and change.

It is for this reason that Christian individuals and churches have no warrant for treating homosexual persons who are repentant in regard to their practices in any other than a supportive and loving manner. Such support and love will so often prove to be the very means that God desires to use to assist homosexual people to remain firm in their desire to be obedient to Christ and in their quest for loving friendships. This love must be "tough love", a love which recognises that the best interests of people are served when obedience to God is paramount. This distinguishes Christian love from sentimentality that might exalt the fulfilment of desires above allegiance to God's ways. It will seek to avoid known avenues of temptation by encouraging a tough minded accountability. The long term consequences of this tough love are noted by John Stott: "it is true that we must accept one another, but only as fellow penitents and fellow pilgrims, not as fellow sinners who are resolved to persist in our sinning. No

acceptance, either by God or by the church, is promised to us if we harden our hearts against God's Word and will. Only Judgement."

- (f) Should a person refuse to repent of homosexual behaviour (or any other form of sinful speech or action) the church and individual Christians have one further way of expressing God's love toward that person. It is the way of exhortation (Jude 22-23; James 5:18-20) which is firstly private and only then public (Matthew 18:15-20). Such private and especially public exhortation should never be on the basis of rumour, hearsay or gossip (hence the repeated "testimony of two or three witnesses" Matthew 18:16; 1 Timothy 5:19).

Should a person not repent, the difficult yet loving action of disfellowshipping such a person needs to be taken (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15). The reason for this action is entirely loving and flows out of a concern for their eternal salvation (1 Corinthians 5:4-5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15) and the witness and purity of the church (1 Corinthians 5:6-11).

The Biblical Texts

19. The key passages dealing with homosexuality are Genesis 18 (Jude 7); Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. It is sometimes argued that these passages at best condemn pack rape (Genesis 18), temple homosexual practice (Leviticus), chosen homosexual practice by heterosexuals (Romans 1) and engaging with/trading in boys (1 Corinthians 6: 1 Timothy 1). We must note that even if these assumptions exhausted the meaning of these texts, what we have is a condemnation of these specific cultural manifestations of homosexual behaviour because all homosexual practice is considered to be a violation of the creation pattern expressed in Genesis 2:24. Since this basis is creational it is applicable to every culture and violation of the God given creation of male and female. Given the basis in creation (endorsed by Jesus in Matthew 19 and the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5) it is surely reasonable and responsible for Christians today to assume that every form of homosexual intercourse including faithful, caring homosexual partnerships is a violation of God's will.

20. Romans 1:18-32 is worthy of comment since it provides a commentary on Genesis 1-3. Each person has an orientation to sin, an orientation away from God's way. All sin is basically a desire to leave God out of the picture (18-20), this in turn leads to idolatry via unclear thoughts about God (21-23) and the worship of the idol which turns out to be false (24-25). It is a timely yet tragic reminder that when sex (God's gift) is exalted above its Creator it inevitably becomes distorted. Since we are morally responsible to God He lets us live with the consequences of our behaviour. The refrain "therefore God gave them over" reminds us of the way sinful behaviour hardens us against God and leads to patterns of conduct that are a distortion of the Creator's good purposes for human kind. The process continues and is seen in same sex relationships (26-27) and general sinful behaviour that flows from living independently of God (29-32). When applied to homosexual orientation it is a reasonable assumption that the orientation away from the God given pattern of "male and female" is a consequence of fallen human nature. If given the wrong encouragement through parental neglect or societal example this orientation may become a hardened attitude, following a preferred choice or a powerful, albeit unwelcomed, orientation.

21. The context of Romans 1:18-32, coming as it does before the clear explanation of the gospel, which is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (1:16-17), must be kept in mind. How can any sinner be saved from God's wrath (1:18) and the debilitating effect of being given over to sin's consequences (1:24, 26, 28)? Through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. These themes are systematically dealt with from 3:20 - 8:39 and 12:1 - 15:32. In gospel terms homosexual practice (or any other single sin) is not the real issue. Sins are evidence of our sinful rebellion. It is this rebellion that must be repented of. Once this happens the believer will want to deal with each and every sin that is part of their experience (Romans 6-8). In seeking to act in a loving way toward homosexual people is it not possible that by refusing to call all homosexual practice sinful and by claiming that homosexual orientation is as equally acceptable to God as heterosexual, that the merciful medicine of the Great Physician is being denied to homosexual people? The reality of Jesus' teaching is that it is only people who realise that they are sinners who will repent. Repentance is always the door into the freedom of knowing and serving Christ.

ROLE OF THE CHURCH

22. The church's role in all of this is important in the following ways:

(a.) To uphold by teaching and conduct the clear Biblical pattern of human sexuality

23. Suggestions that there is no one Biblical pattern cannot be sustained when the scriptures are taken in context and in their entirety. The prescriptive New Testament passages (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4; Ephesians 5:3-7, 21-23; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, 7:1-7; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-14; 1 Timothy 1:8-11) endorse and build on the creation account (Genesis 2:24) and Old Testament moral laws (laws endorsed and filled out by our Lord in Matthew 5:17-20 and 27-30; and the Council of Jerusalem Acts 15:20). Some ethical decisions, such as contraception have to be decided upon principles drawn from scripture and at the end of the day must be left to the prayerful personal choice of individuals. The reason for this is that there are no clear prescriptive guidelines in the Bible for these issues. God however has not left us without clear prescriptive guidelines concerning the proper context for sexual expression. There are a significant number of unambiguous commands that are prescriptive - e.g. (i) sex is to be between men and women (not men and men). (ii) who are married to one another and (iii) with thoughtful and joyful consideration for one another.

24. Biblical paradigms or themes of God's relationship with human kind such as faithfulness whilst helpful in affirming godly behaviour, cannot be pressed into service if they override clear God given prescriptions. The Church is not being faithful to God if in its desire to affirm faithfulness between people, endorses homosexual partnerships or pre-marital sexual relationships of those who are "faithful" to their partner, if it overthrows clear Biblical prescriptions. For Christians, faithfulness to others must of necessity follow from faithfulness to God. Indeed faithfulness to God and His revealed mind will ensure true faithfulness in relationships. The pattern of behaviour amongst church members will be at one and the same time a witness to the watching world and an encouragement to each other to form and grow, faithful, attractive and caring relationships. It is a matter of fact that the teaching and lifestyle of Christians has always been different from non-Christians and a means of attracting them to the Lord. This is especially so when it comes to

sexual fidelity. It is no surprise to those who take the description of decline from idolatry in Romans 1 seriously, that in our society, where sex has become an idol, many people are hurt by their experience of relationships in general and sexual liaisons in particular. Where the church proclaims and lives out the gospel and the Biblical sexual ethic there will be a visual example of the fruits of sexual fidelity together with forgiveness and the means of God's grace.

25. To exhibit Christian fellowship among men and women of all ages. This is in itself attractive and when operating in an honest way provides a wonderful crucible in which people may grow. The Christlike pattern of service can be experienced as so much more effective than the ways of self-centredness. Friendships can be formed and experienced that are built upon mutual respect and consideration rather than upon sexual activity. Marriage partners will therefore not be chosen either to fulfil sexual or self-centred means. Marriage will less likely be entered into "unadvisedly, lightly, or merely to satisfy physical desires". (AAPB page 548). The model and experience of relating in Christ-like ways will enable Christian people to grow in ways that will bring maturity since the basis and expectation will be Christ-like. People will be seen as people to be served rather than existing to meet needs, or as objects to fulfil desires. When this is taught, modelled and experienced within the Christian church the sexual gift will not be exalted to a place it was never designed to have. It will not be seen as the principal means of intimacy nor the gauge of a successful relationship or the prowess of an individual. Here the church has a unique opportunity of demonstrating a "better way" to a community that has lost its way. It is the contention of this report that this opportunity is indeed a responsibility laid on us by our Lord and can only be delivered by obedience to the revealed Word of the Lord.
26. It is a matter of observation that permissive sexual ethics which endorse sexual practices outside of heterosexual marriage, have not delivered increased freedom or happiness for anybody at all. A new bondage to the law of diminishing returns has replaced the freedom delivered by mutual fidelity and individual self control. Psychiatrist Philip G. Ney observes that "sexual relationships are becoming increasingly abnormal....although more sex education and less guilt are supposed to solve sex problems. There is growing impotence, homosexuality, rape and sado-masochistic relationships." "It has become the current hedonistic philosophy that the body is the source of all pleasure. The emphasis is on tactile pleasure, particularly genital. Unfortunately,

orgasmic sensations are short lived. Since life's purpose has become genital pleasure, more frequent and more intense stimulation and excitement is demanded. There is a vicious cycle of stimulation, gratification, satiation, and boredom, with no end in sight to the amount of stimulation that is going to be required. When sufficient stimulation can no longer be obtained to prevent their boredom, there is complaint of depression. The media attempts to keep up with the demand by producing more bizarre kinds of stimulation".

27. Any approach to the Bible that seeks to dismantle its clear commands and message will find itself contributing to this alarming outworking of the law of diminishing returns.
28. If the church's call to a lifestyle that is not hedonistic but Christocentric and "otherpersoncentric" is to be taken seriously it must be consistent with the entire clear message of scripture. This includes a clear and caring exposition of the God-given absolute sexual standards. Where this is matched by a caring and humble expression of godly conduct in relationships the church can expect to be honoured by God and sought out by people. Sometimes people grow weary of the hedonistic world view and lifestyle either through unfulfilled desires and/or guilt. When they find people who are able to diagnose the reason for their frustration and guilt (a transgression of God's laws), prescribe a proven medicine (the gospel of Jesus Christ) and lovingly explain the appropriate way to receive the remedy (repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ) they can rejoice and experience real support and clear direction in a new godly lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

29. It is an awesome task to present a minority report on a subject so vital to the happiness and welfare of all men and women.
30. In essence and conclusion the key issues can be expressed in the following way:
 1. Scripture is both sufficient and clear in the issues of sexuality and sexual behaviour. Taken as a whole it yields a consistent message that sexual practice is to be confined to the heterosexual marriage relationship. Furthermore the principle of clarity is essential to the character of God in terms of his love in expressing Himself plainly in an understandable way and His holding us accountable for our

behaviour. The scriptures are the "common domain" of humble Christians who do not require any interpreter other than God the Holy Spirit in knowing how to live responsibly (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

2. The forgiveness and grace of God that are available to all people for all kinds of sin (including sexual) are conditional upon true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. True repentance requires an objective standard that outlines God's will. When this is compromised or made subject to our ways we are found not only to be encouraging sinful behaviour but also closing the way of pardon and the grace of God to people. God's love is a true love that desires and demands change. Change is only possible through the gospel. The response to the gospel according to our Lord is repentance.
3. The apostle John urged Christians to keep themselves from idols (1 John 5:21). Few would argue with the proposition that sex has become an idol in our society.

Societies and nations have consistently burnt themselves out by the misuse of the sexual gift. Our western culture shows every sign of being in an advanced state of decay through worshipping the idol of sex. The young in our community, many of whom have not experienced the joyful fruits of faithful family life, community example or Godly models are most vulnerable to the harmful effects of this idolatry. They do not know the loving purpose of God in providing commandments which are designed to provide restraint and guidelines for behaviour. Nor do they know or see the need for the forgiveness or power of God's Spirit available through the gospel.

As a church and as individual Christians we have a compelling duty and command from our Lord to live as salt and light in the world. We cannot impose God's standards upon the world in general, but we certainly have an obligation to require them of each other within the Christian church. By doing so we will be neither hiding our light by condoning darkness nor by becoming so insipidly saltless that we have no distinctive flavour to enhance society or attract others to God and His ways (Matthew 5:13-16).

Persons can never be more truly human than when they return to

God their Creator via repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, begin to know and obey His will in daily life via Holy Scripture and the Holy Spirit and find joy in living for Him as His people and representatives (as salt and light) in a world that desperately needs both flavour and light.

QUESTIONS for discussion or personal reflection

1. **INTRODUCTION** (sections 1-4)
Why is it important that we trust the Bible as a clear and objective word from God?
2. **THE HUMAN PERSON** (section 5-6)
 - a) Look at the picture of a perfect creation in Genesis 1-2 and the world as we know it now, listing some of the differences.
 - b) Which picture is most whole and complete?
 - c) Why is that?
3. **SEXUALITY** (sections 7-15)
 - a) Read Galatians 5:22-26 which shows the attributes of a person growing in Godliness and achieving their full potential. How is this achieved?

Go back and read 5:16-26. What do you learn from this passage that will help you live Christianly in the area of sexuality?
 - b) In sections 10-12 the popular notion that sex is essential to a person's fulfilment is challenged. What do you find helpful in these sections?
 - c) Study 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 together. In what ways does this passage
 - a) challenge you?
 - b) encourage you?

4) **HOMOSEXUALITY** (sections 16-21)

- a) Read Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:24. What do these verses tell us about the purposes of God in creating humans as both male and female?
- b) Read Colossians 1:3-11. What verbs does Paul use in the verses 1,2,5 and 8?
- c) In what ways do the words of John Murray, quoted at the end of section 18b, help you in understanding the daily struggle to be Christian in every area of life?
- d) What are the implications of section 18c, where the author speaks about discrimination against homosexual and lesbian people?

Why are these important?

- e) Read through the key Biblical texts (section 19). What are the common threads and do you agree that they are consistent with Genesis 2:24?
- f) What do you learn from Romans 1:18-32?

5) **ROLE OF THE CHURCH** (sections 22-28)a)

- a) What do you think of the statement "There are a significant number of unambiguous commands that are prescriptive, eg
 - i) sex is to be between men and women (not men and men)
 - ii) who are married to one another, and
 - iii) with thoughtful and joyful consideration of one another".

Do you consider this to be an adequate summary of Biblical teaching on sexuality?
Why? Why not?

- b) In section 26 "a new bondage to the law of diminishing returns" is spoken of. Do you agree with this? In what ways does this quote from Phillip Ney help you in your Christian discipleship?
- 6) **CONCLUSION**(sections 29 & 30)
Read each section 30.1, 30.2 and 30.3. Comment on one aspect from each section that you have found helpful and/or a challenge. Share it with the group and make each a matter of prayer.