



Sexual Ethics



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTE FOR GROUP LEADERS

We invite leaders to prepare for group discussions by doing some background reading about the interpretation of biblical texts, which are central to many of the issues raised in this study. At the back of this booklet you will find some useful resources that we commend to you, to assist in the facilitation of discussions. We also draw your attention to the fact that there are sexual themes in the booklet, and that this study is suitable for use with young people aged 13 and over.

- *Editorial committee.*

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Foreword

As a parish minister I have always been grateful to the scholars and communicators within the Church who provide us with excellent resources for our day-to-day ministry. This new resource on sexual ethics is a timely gift to the Church in New Zealand. It is my prayer that it will be taken up by the people in our faith communities and used widely to help all people wrestle with ethical issues that we face in New Zealand society.

Ethics has been described as the science of behaviour. As one who has lived through six decades of life in New Zealand I am only too well aware that the concept of “acceptable” behaviour has changed dramatically in that time. This is especially true in the realm of human sexuality. Sexual behaviour that would have been frowned upon forty years ago is now likely to be seen as acceptable by many. Aspects of sexual behaviour that would have been spoken of in whispers when I was growing up are now considered normal and may not even feature in general conversation at all. However, the converse is also true: sexual behaviour, especially by some men towards women and children, that society had once turned a blind eye to, is now considered worse than unacceptable.

This resource is designed to help us dig a little deeper than simply observe what is happening in our society and base our values of behaviour on that. Ethical behaviour based on that foundation will always be a downward spiral. This resource invites us to examine sexual ethics in the biblical context, sexual ethics

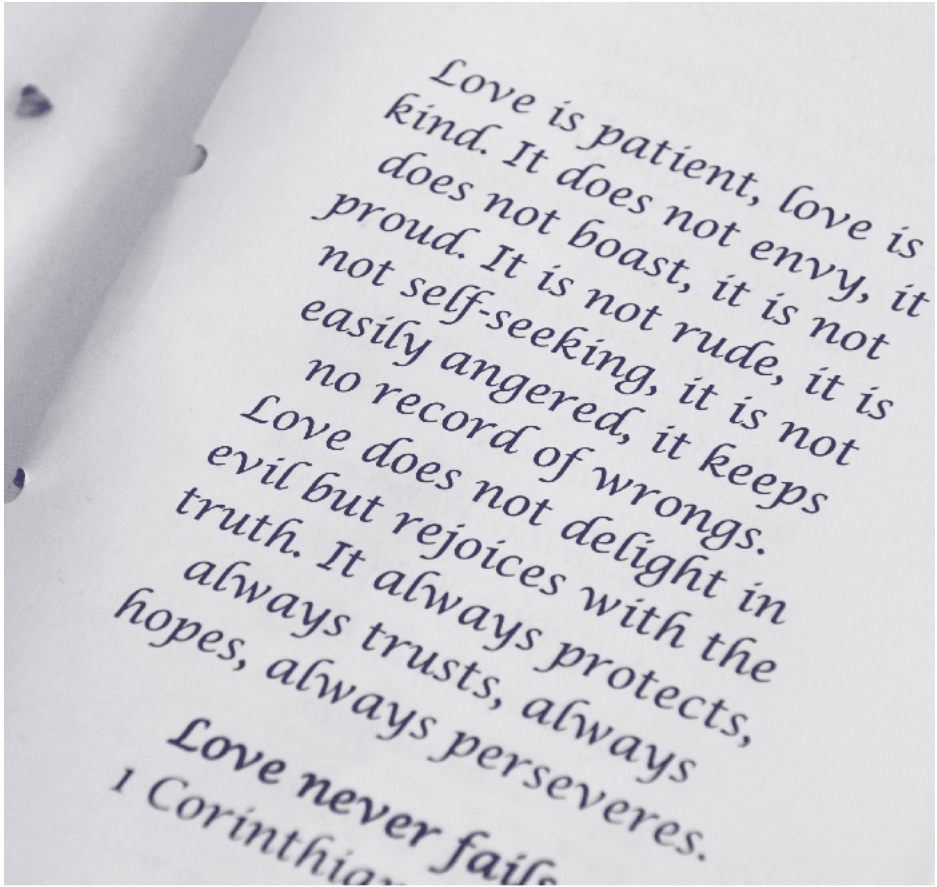
in the history of Christianity and finally sexual ethics from a Christian perspective in our fast-changing society. With that three-legged foundation we can then discuss the science of behaviour in our own context.

Christian ethics – especially the Christian attitude towards human sexuality has often been perceived as a long list of things that people must not do. Of course, there has to be some truth in that. Individual people were never designed to live in isolation from each other. We are designed to live in community. Therefore things like love, loyalty, forgiveness, service, commitment, trust are community matters. When any of the negative aspects of these behaviours are damaging the overall good or security of society, the community has to say “don’t behave that way”. As followers of Jesus though, our call is to have the higher ethic of copying Jesus, living and behaving with an attitude to others that acts only for their good. There is a danger for us as Christians to be so consumed in being “right” that we fail to see what is good. As you use this resource may you be aware of both “right” and “good” as you seek to serve the people of your community.

From the Presbyterian Church I do thank each of the writers, the editors and publishers for this very helpful resource.



Very Rev Ray Coster



Study One

Sexual Ethics and the Bible

Sexual Ethics and the Bible

What is sexual ethics?

Sexual ethics concerns issues about human sexuality, including sexual behaviour. Broadly speaking, sexual ethics relates to community and personal standards about the conduct of interpersonal relations, including sexual relations within or outside of marriage, issues of consent and power (like rape or incest), how individuals relate to society, and how individual behaviour impacts public health concerns.¹

This definition sets the context for these studies, so now let's consider what the Bible has to say about sexual ethics.

Sex: damned with faint praise? Or sublime?

There is no evidence that Jesus had sexual relations or marriage. Neither did Paul (unless he was a widower). Paul urged singleness as the better option (1 Cor 7.8). Jesus indicated that there was no marriage in heaven (Matt 22.30). So is the status of sex and marriage rather suspect in Christianity? Are sex and marriage damned with faint praise? On the other hand the Old Testament includes the Song of Solomon, a very colourful love narrative. And Ephesians uses the image of marital union to explain the union of Christ and the Church (Eph 5.31-32). Does that indicate that, on the contrary, sex and marriage have near sublime status? What are we to make of all this?

This introduction highlights several issues:

- » The reality of biblical complexity in relation to sexuality issues
- » The need to consider the context and purpose of each writer when drawing from biblical texts
- » The need for openness to hearing from the full range of biblical voices in order to come to a biblical/Christian perspective
- » The need for an interpretive lens in reading the array of texts to develop a coherent biblical perspective.

This last point is an important one. We ought not "flatten out" scripture and give all parts equal value. There is progressive revelation in the Bible, and that revelation comes to fullness in the coming of Christ: "God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1.1-2). Many matters are of secondary importance: "the substance belongs to Christ" (Col 2.17). As we consider sexual ethics, we also need to be asking: does this line up with what the scriptures reveal in relation to Christ?



The Church's Position On...

Marriage

General Assembly decisions affirm that the Church upholds the historic Christian understanding of marriage as the loving, faithful union of a man and a woman.

Leadership

General Assembly decided that the Church may not accept for training, licensing, ordination, or induction anyone involved in a sexual relationship outside of faithful marriage between a man and a woman.

Divorce

The Church strongly endorses the sanctity of marriage, and divorced persons may re-marry in Presbyterian churches.

Abortion

General Assembly has affirmed the sanctity of all human life in various decisions. Assembly also supported that where no possibility of conscious life exists, health professionals have no obligation to keep an infant alive.

Sex Selection For Unborn Children

General Assembly supported a ban on parents using pre-birth testing to select the sex of unborn children for non-medical reasons.

Same-Sex Marriage

General Assembly has decided that a minister may solemnise marriage only between a man and woman.

Thinking about the Old Testament

In colourful language Jesus said that not a jot or a tittle would pass from the law (Matt 5.17-19). At the same time this is immediately followed by "it is written . . . but I say unto you" (Matt 5.21-48), pressing beyond the letter of the law into its spirit and deeper intent.

At first glance all seems straightforward – commandment number seven: "you shall not commit adultery" (Exod 20.14). Yes, but many issues are not covered in that text (pre-marital sex being the most obvious one).

So what does this mean for sexual ethics? Is it a matter of simply finding a text on a topic and nothing more need be said? Such an approach makes the Bible a rules book, yet a rules approach to religion was the opposite of what Jesus was on about.

As we work towards a fuller understanding of sexual morality, it is useful to consider all that the Bible says about sexual ethics, especially considering some of the diverse material in the Old Testament relating to sexuality:

- » The prohibition on taking a sister (Lev 18.18; also Lev 20.14) may imply the sanctioning of polygamy (and a number of the great Old Testament heroes including Abraham and David practised polygamy).
- » Women captured in warfare may become the booty of the victor (Num 31.18; Deut 20.14; 21.10-13).
- » A man who rapes a single woman is to pay compensation to her father and take the woman as his wife. She seems to have no say in the matter (Deut 22.28).
- » Divorce is permitted in Deuteronomy (24.1-4), but described as hateful to God in Malachi (2.16).

What are we to make of all of this? The divorce issue suggests a way through the textual thickets. Jesus expressed opposition to divorce. When pressed as to why then divorce was permitted through Moses in Deuteronomy, Jesus attributed the situation to hardness of the human heart (Matt 19.8). In other words, rather than being positively sanctioned, it was an acknowledgement that because separation/divorce was bound to happen anyway, divorce was permitted in the context of human frailty and social custom.

Some of these Old Testament stories and injunctions seem to be intertwined with issues of family shame and male property rights. What we are encountering here is more community custom than divine will. And this can be stated even more categorically when we reflect on this through the lens of Christ and his life and teaching.

Bearing in mind the letter of the law as it is written in the Bible, as well as the deeper spirit and intent of the words, are all of the Bible's teachings on sexual morality hard and fast? Or are there some teachings we can ignore? Or some that are no longer relevant? If so, which ones?

We will examine the important issues raised by these questions as we progress through these studies, but one thing that is evident is that issues of law and ethics are far from simple.

For discussion

- » To what extent do you consider the Bible as a rules book? If yes, what rules do we follow, what do we not follow?
- » Do you fully embrace all the Old Testament material that relates to sexual ethics? Or do you see some as simply reflecting the culture of that time?

Old Testament sexual ethics

Among the many issues of sexual morality considered in the Old Testament are the nature of our sexuality, marriage, the positive and more negative elements of sexual behaviour, prostitution, masturbation, pre-marital sex and same-sex relationships.

In particular, the Old Testament offers several core texts that are relevant to the construction of a sexual ethic – especially the opening two chapters of Genesis. It is to this material that both Jesus and Paul made their appeals (Matt 19.4-5; Eph 5.31).

In Genesis 1 human beings are effectively described as being the pinnacle of creation: made in the image of God (Gen 1.26-27). This “image of God” is not a vague spiritual quality. It is down-to-earth – body included: “*male and female* he created them”. The conclusion then is that sexuality constitutes an essential dimension of the human person.² Each of us is an embodied and gendered person.

A separate creation story in Genesis 2 adds further theological insight. There, only a man (Adam) was created at first. But “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2.18). So a woman (Eve) was made to provide companionship. Not only that but also union – sexual union: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 2.24).

Are humans like marbles in a bag, physically proximate with others but having no essential relationship (stand-alone beings)? Or are we like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle designed to join together (beings in community)?³ And is that union expressed par excellence in marriage? This then makes our sexuality something very good: “they were both naked but were not ashamed” (Gen 2.25).

However, in the biblical narrative, sexuality is tainted by the fall from grace. Post-fall there is a tension between the positive and negative elements of sexual behaviour. How are the goodness of sex and the limits of sex to be balanced? That will be considered further as we look to the New Testament, but before that, let’s examine several of the key sexual morality issues covered in the Old Testament.

Incest is among the sexual behaviours prohibited in the Old Testament. Lev 18 describes a range of sexual relations between relatives that were considered unlawful at the time, and continue to be condemned today.

Any man who engaged in fornication (consensual sex outside marriage) was required to take the woman as his wife (Exo 22.16-17). Heavy punishment – death – existed for adulterers (Lev 20.10, Deut 22.22) and men who committed rape (Deut 22.25). Prostitution was condemned as an abomination to the Lord (Deut 23.18).

The particular issue of same-sex relations

The Old Testament position seems patently clear: condemnation in the story of Sodom (Gen 19) and in the Holiness Code (Lev 18.22; 20.13; also Deut 23.18). However, this biblical material is not as clear-cut as it first appears according to Old Testament scholars.

For example, the prescriptions against homosexual relations in Leviticus are clear: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman”, however, the motivation for the proscription is less clear. David Jensen suggests that the reason is separation from the religious practices or idolatry of neighbouring peoples.⁴

This is one academic’s view, and you will have your own perspective on this matter. To better understand God’s view of homosexual relations, these studies urge consideration of a range of texts in coming to a view. Is homosexuality being treated as wrong for reasons other than the act in itself?

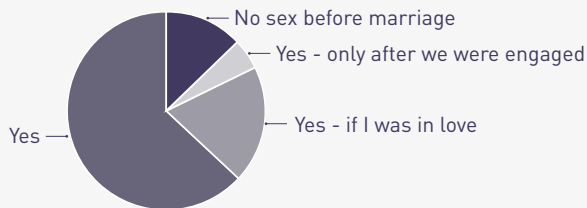
Case Study: Changing Christian attitudes to dating

A 2014 study of more than 2,600 single Christians in America has revealed that Christian attitudes toward dating are more in step with current social trends than traditional Christian values.

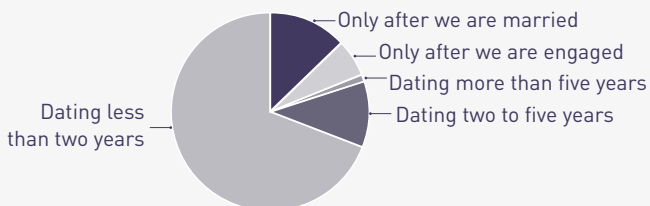
Among the key findings are that 87 percent of those surveyed would have pre-marital sex. Of those people, 24 percent would only do so only if they were in love or were engaged. And it's not just young people expressing this sentiment – older Christians are more likely to say yes to pre-marital sex than their younger counterparts: 67 percent of those aged over 45 would say yes to sex before marriage, compared to 58 percent of 18-24 year olds.

Only 13 percent of those surveyed indicated that they wait until after marriage to move in together, and a further 6 percent would wait until after they were engaged. Almost 70 percent of people surveyed indicated that they would be willing to move in with their partner within two years of starting dating.

Attitude to Sex Before Marriage



Attitude to Living Together Before Marriage



For discussion

- » What are the advantages and disadvantages of relying on individual texts to answer ethical questions?
 - » Reflect on the sexual behaviour stories in the Old Testament. What do you see as the positive aspects of sex and the more negative aspects of sex?
-

New Testament sexual ethics

Sexual sin, along with materialism and injustice are major concerns in the New Testament, although the gospels do not focus significantly on these areas.

There are approximately 35 references to adultery (the *moich* family of Greek

words), though some of these are a metaphor for spiritual unfaithfulness. Several writers from around the first century, including Philo, Josephus and Pseudo-Phocylides, show a common Jewish view that proscribed sexual behaviours include fornication, homosexual practices, adultery, rape, bestiality and abortion.⁵ This is a very significant point, for the sexual ethics of the New Testament and the early Church are basically in conformity with this perspective.

There are more than 40 references to *porneia* (an umbrella word to cover all kinds of unlawful sexual intercourse⁶) and related words in the New Testament and around one-third of these references relate to spiritual unfaithfulness. *Porneia* occurs repeatedly in lists of serious sins, and in one case is identified as a barrier to inheriting the kingdom of God.⁷

Modern Sexuality Issues

A number of modern sexuality issues are not discussed explicitly in the New Testament. Among them are contraception, trans-gendering, intersexuality, and various fertility treatments including sperm and egg donation. There is insufficient space in these studies to consider these matters in detail, but they are nonetheless important elements of a discussion on sexual ethics. These matters can only be considered on broader ethical grounds (eg the enhancement of life) without the aid of direct Bible passages on the matters.

InterChurch Bioethics Council

The Interchurch Bioethics Council, which represents the Presbyterian Church, as well as the Anglican, and Methodist churches in New Zealand is committed to exploring the spiritual, ethical and cultural dimensions of biotechnology in Aotearoa-New Zealand. The Council has produced submissions, papers and resources on range of relevant issues such as fertility treatments, sex selection and pre-birth testing of embryos and more. To examine these issues further, check out the resources that are available at the Interchurch Bioethics Council website: www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz

This suggests that in the New Testament there is major concern about materialism, injustice *and* sexual sin.

Marriage or celibacy?

Within the New Testament there is a high level of honouring of singleness/celibacy when it is chosen for the larger good of sacrificially foregoing marriage for the sake of service in the kingdom of God (Matt 19.10-12, 29). And singleness may be a gift, a *charisma*, as much as prophecy, healing or marriage may be (1 Cor 7.7).

While singleness is honoured, there is also major support for the married state. The marriage bed is to be honoured (Heb 13.4). The quality of the marital union is such that it images the relationship of Christ with the believing community (Eph 5.31-32). Marriage is good, and any assertion that it is disallowed is diabolical teaching (1 Tim 4.1-4).

What about divorce?

The prizing of marriage as a great good leads to major New Testament concern to protect it, both from infidelity and from divorce. In an ideal world there should be no divorce (Mark 10.2-12). Yet there is recognition of human frailty and fallibility. So adultery may lead to divorce (and remarriage), as may desertion by a non-believing partner (Matt 19.9; 1 Cor 7.15).

Are those the only grounds for divorce? If the Bible were a rule book, the answer would be "yes". However, the fact that there is an absolute prohibition in one verse and exceptions in two other texts suggests that we look at the spirit of the prohibition and not the letter.

This means that lifelong, faithful marriage is God's standard for married people even though circumstances may

end the marriage. Marriage vows are a promise of lifelong love, support and loyalty; and any divorce is a sad (and painful) recognition of human frailty, failure and sin.

For discussion

- » What do you consider to be the essential characteristics of marriage as it is portrayed in the Bible?
 - » Given the honouring of the single state in the New Testament, why is this not more honoured in our Christian circles today?
 - » The Church faces the dilemma that while faithful, lifelong marriage is the ideal, divorce happens often (in about one-third of marriages today). What factors might we consider as a Church as we respond to the reality of divorce?
-

The particular issue of same-sex relationships

One contemporary issue, however, that does have significant, though limited, discussion is that of homosexual relations (see Rom 1.26-27; 1 Cor 6.9-11; 1 Tim 1.10; possibly Jude 7). There are a limited number of these references and they tend to crop up as part of a larger argument focusing on other matters.

Some scholars who are liberal on the issue of same-sex relations have argued that Paul was reacting to a particular Greco-Roman cultural situation where homosexuality took place between an older and a younger adult male (pederasty), which does not relate to

the 21st century situation of loving, consensual relationships between equals. Moreover, say these scholars, writers like Paul were simply discussing behaviour and lacked the modern understanding of fixed orientation. In addition, these scholars believe Jesus said nothing about or against this aspect of human relationships.⁸ Against these arguments, those supportive of male-female relationships as God's intention for human relations make the following points:

- » Consensual, adult-adult, same-sex relationships occurred in the ancient world.
- » Paul condemns homosexual expression generally (and not just pederasty) as shown by his inclusion of women (lesbianism) in Rom 1.26.
- » The New Testament is reflective of a common Jewish understanding of that time that condemned all sexual relationships outside of marriage.
- » Jesus implicitly commented on homosexuality with his significant concern about *porneia*, an umbrella term that included homosexuality.

As the Doctrine Core Group note in their 2014 discussion paper *Christian Perspectives on Marriage: A Discussion Document*: "At the heart of contemporary discussions on sexual ethics are the different ways that people seek to understand the mind of Christ through their reading and interpretation of Scripture".

This study and the ones that follow provide the opportunity for readers to return to the Bible and think more deeply about how they have engaged with questions around sexual ethics to date.

For discussion

- » What new insights have you had in exploring these diverse views on same-sex relations?
-

For reflection

Read Genesis 2:18-25

1. What does this passage say about why God created two sexes?
2. What do you see as being unique and special about the relationship between man and woman through reading this text?
3. Jesus and Paul both quote verse 24 when talking about marriage. Why do you believe this verse was so important to their understanding of marriage?

Read Matthew 5: 17-20, 27-30

1. In responding to the Pharisees, was Jesus raising or lowering the ethical bar with his words? What are the implications of this for Jesus' followers?
2. Jesus used a graphic image when He talked about cutting off our hands and plucking out our eyes. These are not to be taken literally, but to emphasise a point. What do you think Jesus was saying?



Study Two

Sexual Ethics and History



Sexual Ethics and History

The early Church

One value of looking at second century (and later) Church documents is that sometimes they reveal attitudes likely to have been present in the New Testament Church. And they may point to possible options in relation to the very different world of today.

The end-of-first-century manual of instructions, the *Didache*, includes a list of sexually-related transgressions: adultery, pederasty, fornication, abortion and infanticide (2.2; 5.1-2). The abortion prohibition has particular significance in that while it was not a direct prohibition in the Old or New Testament, it was part of the milieu of contemporary Judaism.

Several writers of the early Church era also addressed the perennial issue of premarital sexual relations (fornication). When Tertullian was arguing for adult baptism around 200 AD he recommended that baptism of the unwedded be delayed “until they either marry, or else be more fully strengthened for continence”.¹ It was a note of realism.

Another perennial issue has been the lack of suitable marriage partners for all Christians. This was a particular problem in Rome where more upper class women converted to Christianity than their male counterparts. Such women could not marry into lower classes without losing their property/inheritance rights. Were they then fated to remain single? In the third century Callistus, bishop of Rome,

permitted such women to enter into “just concubinage” (a de facto marriage) with a person of lower class, to deal with this issue. However, Hippolytus, rival to Callistus, delivered a broadside against him for his laxness in allowing this.²

To what extent did the Church control marriage? For much of its history a Church wedding was not an essential aspect of getting married. It was, however, a preferable dimension. However, in the succeeding centuries the Church recognised that a couple could exchange valid marital promises anywhere, at any time.

A major early development in Christianity was the prizing of lifelong singleness (celibacy) above marriage. Much of this was culturally influenced. While hedonism was dominant in many strands of Greco-Roman society, there were also strands (eg. stoicism) that emphasised restraint and self-control. Stoicism, part of the air which Christians breathed, made passion in marriage suspect.³

Around the fourth and fifth centuries the choosing of celibacy came to be structured into what we now call monasticism. Monks/nuns became the elite exemplars of the Christian Church.

They expressed a new “martyrdom”, a self-chosen sacrifice of their sexuality.⁴

Where did that leave the status of marriage? For some, marriage remained equivalent in value to virginity. Jovinian,

around 390 AD asserted that “virgins, widows, and married women, who have once washed in Christ, if they do not differ in other respects, are of equal merit”.⁵ Most did not, however, take this view. Marriage was second best. Thus Origen asserted around 250 AD, “God has allowed us to marry wives because not everyone is capable of the superior condition which is to be absolutely pure”.⁶

What about sex within marriage? The pervasive view came to be that sex was valid only if it had procreative intent. Augustine’s said: “For necessary sexual intercourse for begetting, is free from blame, and itself is alone worthy of marriage. But that which goes beyond this necessity, no longer follows reason, but lust”.⁷ The result is that marital sex for pleasure was categorised as sinful (though a venial and not a mortal sin).

Despite his lukewarm views on marriage, Augustine called it a “sacrament”.⁸ This did not necessarily carry the meaning that it does today. In Augustine’s time a sacrament was a solemn oath, a binding promise beyond a mundane contractual arrangement. Augustine’s views deeply shaped the thought of the Catholic Church in the following centuries.

For discussion

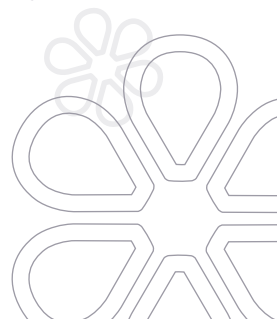
- » Are your sympathies with Callistus or with Hippolytus on the issue of de facto relationships? Why?
 - » What relevance can you see for the Church and society today, in the early Church’s decision to sanction de facto relationships?
-

The medieval Church

A “sacrament” gradually came to be viewed as something that brought divine grace to the believer. Marriage was first formally declared a “sacrament” by the Catholic Church at the Council of Verona in 1184. This would suggest that marriage was rated highly by the medieval Church.

It seems, however, that there were two contradictory views in the medieval Church. One was this idea of marriage as a sacrament. This understanding may have become promoted because of the Church’s struggle in the later middle ages to gain control over the sanctioning of marriage. Marriage had earlier been loosely defined and loosely entered into. A couple could become married by simply making marital promises and engaging in sex. Such clandestine marriages could easily leave uncertainty as to whether a couple were married. According to Lawrence Stone, “up to the eleventh century, casual polygamy seems to have been general, with easy divorce and much concubinage”.⁹

The other and seemingly contradictory view was that the married state was inferior to that of the celibate priest, monk or nun. The Augustinian view dominated, that marital sex was fully justified only where there was procreative intent. The subsequent Protestant Reformation view on marriage was a radical challenge to this Catholic teaching.



Case Study: Marriage by Consent or Ceremony

Some minister friends and I* were talking recently about marriage. We were debating whether marriage starts with consent or ceremony. Our discussions and shared belief that marriage starts with consent (and ends with a withdrawal of consent) led me to share my story.

I met my husband in my first year of university. After we had been in a relationship for a year we grappled with whether we would deepen our commitment by having a sexual relationship. I went to my big sister for advice, not being one to take such a momentous step without serious consideration. Her wise advice was to give it to God. I told her we felt that we would one day marry. She suggested that if I committed my decision to prayer, I probably would feel peace and clarity about my decision and this is exactly what happened. I shared my decision-making process with my boyfriend and together we planned to take our relationship to the next level of commitment. Four years later we decided that considering our ongoing commitment and a desire to save for our wedding, it would make sense for us to pool our resources and live together.

Around this time we decided to participate in a “Finding new life in the spirit” course being offered at a church different to the one where we worshipped. During, the second-to-last week of the course we were asked to reflect on the “sin” in our lives, confess and repent. We were told that failure to do this would impede our receiving the Holy Spirit. Our living together was something we generally avoided mentioning to our Christian friends, but we decided that in the interests of our spiritual life it was time to “fess up”. So we made an appointment to visit the minister running the course. The minister confirmed that we were “living in sin” and suggested the only course of action would be for one of us to move out until we were married.

As we drove home we questioned who we were doing this for. We were in a committed and loving relationship. We were getting legally married in three months and in our minds we had been spiritually married for four years. We decided that our relationship was between God and us and that living separately at this stage of the game would be dishonest and not something we believed God desired of us. We received the Holy Spirit the following week. We married three months later and have had a wonderful Christ-centred marriage for 31 years.

**The woman who shares her experiences here wishes to remain anonymous.*

GEN 2:24

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

For discussion

- » Was this elevation of celibacy biblical? Realistic? Healthy? How does this view of celibacy colour Christian perceptions of sexual expression today?
 - » How do you respond to the statement that the proper context for sex is marriage?
-

The Protestant Reformers

The ex-monk Martin Luther denounced clerical celibacy as an “abomination”.^{10,11} The sexual impulse was too strong for most: “Single men cannot be trusted very far; even married men have all they can do to keep from falling... With single men one can have neither hope nor confidence, but only constant fear”.¹² So, marriage was the norm and the sooner the better:

“A young man should marry at the age of twenty at the latest, a young woman at fifteen to eighteen”.¹³

Luther drew heavily on Genesis 1-2 in his understanding of marriage. Regarding Genesis 1.27: “God divided mankind into two classes, namely male and female, a he and a she. . . . But we are exactly as he created us: I a man and you a woman. Moreover, He wills to have His excellent creation honored as his divine creation, and not despised”.

Genesis 1.28 shows that we are called to multiply: “For it is not a matter of free choice or decision but a natural and necessary thing, that whatever is a man must have a woman and whatever is a woman must have a man”.¹⁴ Through the

fall, all of life, including sex, is affected by sin, yet marital sex is blessed of God: “Intercourse is never without sin but God excuses it by his grace because the estate of marriage is his work”.

John Calvin’s stance was similar. He noted that marriage was a preventive to sin and the means of procreation. But in addition it fostered the mutual love and support of husband and wife.

Marriage was more than a contract: it was covenantal. This made God a third party to every marriage, adding a spiritual dimension to marriage.¹⁵ At the same time Calvin recognised fault-based divorce based on adultery or desertion.

Aware of human fallibility, Calvin insisted on very short periods of engagement: six weeks at most in order to avoid pre-marital cohabitation.

For discussion

- » Do human relationships bring us closer to God? If so, can marriage relationships bring us closer to God?
 - » On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate Luther’s views on marriage? Why did you choose that number?
 - » Consider Calvin’s views (a) marriage as a covenant, (b) realism in relation to divorce, (c) short engagements. What do you think about these ideas?
-

The early modern period

The reformers largely had a positive view of marriage and of sexual union within marriage. This carried forward

into the Puritan movement in England and elsewhere. Puritans were driven by a strong sense of duty and were relatively disdainful of pleasure.

This sort of perspective flowed into the Victorianism of the latter half of the 19th century. In that context there was an elevated sense of morality and duty in public life and a relative diminution of self-interest and pleasure. This had its spin-off in great care being exercised in relation to sexual propriety. Later generations condemned this as “puritanism” and “Victorianism”.

For discussion

- » Did the Puritans have a “Christian” approach to duty and pleasure? Conversely is the dominant approach today to pleasure “Christian”? How might this affect our approach to sexual ethics?
-

Sexual ethics in New Zealand in the first half of the twentieth century

A strong public ethic of sexual propriety carried over into early settler New Zealand, where the iwi practice of polygamy was frowned upon by early missionaries. The pressures of government and Church eventually saw the demise of polygamy within Maori culture.

This ethic of sexual propriety persisted here into the 1960s. For evangelical churches, including Presbyterianism, this meant that sexual sin was one of the “big three” sins.¹⁶

To a great extent society agreed with the Church. The result of such attitudes was a markedly uniform public view of sexual morality – a view that only heterosexual marital activity was legitimate.¹⁷ A 1955 Department of Health material, for example, asserted, “Sex can be a very beautiful thing, but it is very easily spoilt. It is only in the sanctity of marriage that it can be enjoyed freely, unashamedly, and with the sanction of society”.¹⁸ Such a view was to face fierce challenge and overthrow in the 1960s.

This change affected the Church also. In 1966-1967 we debated a report from a Special Committee on Christian Marriage and Related Matters that endorsed a traditional, conservative sexual ethic. A minority viewpoint argued that this approach on balance was “negative and restrictive” rather than “positive and encouraging”.¹⁹ After significant internal struggle, the 1967 Assembly adopted the report, effectively reaffirming that “sex is for marriage and marriage for sex”.²⁰

That, however, marked the beginning of internal Presbyterian debate over sexuality issues, particularly homosexuality, over the next half century or so.

Radical change from the 1960s

The 1960s was a decade of ferment that included major challenge to a traditional sexual ethic. In the words of psychologist James Ritchie, “We got with sex in the sixties”.²¹ Multiple factors led to this development including wider western influences fuelled by television and international travel, longer periods spent in education, the emergence of the modern teenager, and greater affluence.

Case Study: Pressured to Have Sex

It is common for teenagers and young adults to feel pressure to have sex. In the case of boys or young men, pressure can come from their male peers who are egging them on with tales of real or imagined sexual exploits, and in the case of young women, pressure to have sex is more likely to come from their boyfriends.¹

These examples capture some common experiences among young people:

"My boyfriend told his mates that we had sex lots of times. It isn't true. We haven't had sex at all! Now when I see his friends they all leer at me. I hate it. I called my boyfriend on it, and he apologised. He said he wanted to look cool in front of his mates. But the damage is done. There is no way of fixing my reputation."

"I'm 13 and my boyfriend is 16. I'm a virgin but he isn't. I feel like if I don't have sex with him he is going to break up with me."

"It's easy to give in and say 'yes'. My boyfriend pressured me so much and I gave in – I wish I hadn't and I won't again."

"My boyfriend keeps trying to get me to kiss, touch each other or have sex. I made a promise to God, my Mum and my family that I wouldn't do anything until I get married. My boyfriend always thinks that the reason I don't want to do things with him is because I don't like him –which is so far from the truth."

"When I have sex I feel loved and wanted, that's why I give in. Hoping that something will come out of it and it never does. I like it, but yet on the other hand, I don't."

"[My boyfriend] knew I was feeling insecure and vulnerable. I think that's why he pressured me so much. He made it sound as if I was obliged to have sex because we'd been going out for so long."

¹ Source: Kaiser Family Foundation (2003)

1 JOHN 4:7

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.



Particularly significant was the advent of the birth control pill at the beginning of the 1960s, which became a symbol of sexual freedom.²² As one writer expressed it in 1965, “The pill requires a rethinking of our concepts of sexual morality and a thorough re-examination of the motives behind our present crippling sanctions against those who deviate from the narrow arbitrary paths imposed by those who call themselves Christians”.²³

The pill was quickly seen as a crucial factor in New Zealand becoming a more sexually permissive society. Sex typically became separated from procreational potential; the focus was rather on pleasure. This meant a basic shift from sex-restraint to sex-affirmation.²⁴

Behavioural change was already happening prior to the arrival of the pill. This can be noted in the post-world-war-two rise in the incidence of pregnancies occurring out of wedlock. The illegitimacy rate in New Zealand increased from 8.0 in 1940, to 20.6 in 1960, while the percentage of brides pregnant at their wedding altered from 12.4% to 20.1% in that same period.²⁵

What essentially changed with the pill was a mental change. Consenting sexual behaviour ceased to be a moral issue for many and came to be regarded as “just another body activity like wearing clothes or eating”.²⁶ Inevitably that mental change led in the long-term to further behavioural change. We are no longer in a society that esteems pre-marital chastity with a one-partner-for-life mentality. There is little of a sexual ethic framework beyond its being between consenting adults. The ethical challenge of today’s situation is the subject of the third part of this study.

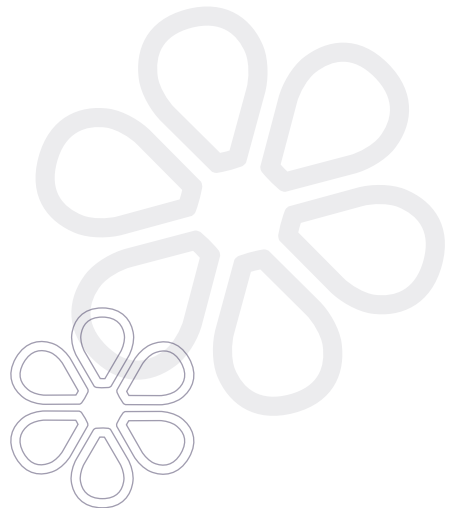
For discussion

- » What do you think about the comment made about the major mental change of the 1960s, that sex is “just another body activity like wearing clothes or eating”?
-

For reflection

Read Matthew 19:1-12

1. When the Pharisees wanted to talk about divorce, Jesus talked about marriage. Why do you think that was? What is Jesus’ understanding of marriage?
2. Jesus allows divorce in certain circumstances. What do you think informed Jesus’ thinking on this?
3. What should be the Church’s attitude to celibacy, given Jesus’ words in verses 10-12?





Study Three

Sexual Ethics and Today's World



Sexual Ethics and Today's World

Decline in Church influence

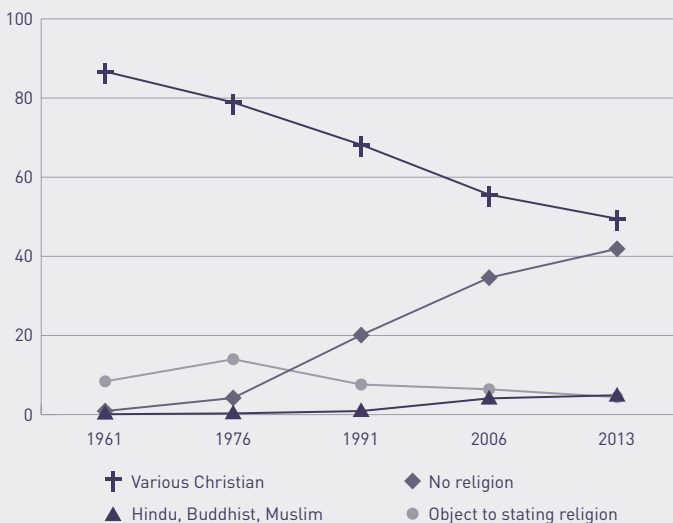
The New Zealand Church faces a number of acute challenges in relation to sexual ethics. One aspect of this is the waning influence of the Church in society. While secularisation is a complex issue we can certainly note a marked decline in church attendance, and also in religious affiliation, as shown in New Zealand's censuses over the last half century.¹

This means that the voice of the Church carries much less weight, perhaps little weight, in society today in relation to sexual ethics.

The gap between Church and society

Waning Church influence is particularly significant because a chasm has opened between societal attitudes and traditional attitudes to sexual ethics. An Australian community life survey in 1998 noted that only seven percent of society viewed pre-marital sex as always or almost always wrong. It then made the observation: "Perhaps the greatest and most obvious rift between the churches and the community is in the area of sexuality and living arrangements".²

Religious Afiliation 1961-2013



Values of individualism and pleasure-seeking have arguably so shaped the Western world that this has led to a change in societal values about to sexuality – that all sexual expression (irrespective of marital status or gender) is good if it is adult, consensual and loving, and that everyone should have a right to such sexual expression. This perspective stands in sharp contrast to perspectives of earlier generations.

One possible response to the shift in societal views is, “if you can’t beat them, join them”. Sociologist Michael Hill highlighted the need for religion to have resonance with its social environment. In his view religious beliefs and practices must have a degree of fit with the everyday experiences of individuals and with the social milieu of the groups those individuals comprise.

Hill asks, “Are beliefs adapted to match a changed environment or do we modify the social world in conformity with a stable set of beliefs?”³ He notes two responses, the first being the “minority” option where people keep their beliefs intact, wall themselves off from a hostile society, and continue more as a sect-type group.⁴ In contrast, the “mainstream” response is to remain involved at the centre of social life through modifying beliefs to maintain resonance with broader social patterns and expectations.⁵ However, this in itself reflects the influence of secularisation, its eroding of beliefs and values. The problem then can be that the Church risks losing its distinctiveness – it is secularised from within. Does it then have anything to say, any reason for being?

For discussion

- » In the light of the Church’s waning influence in society, should Christians express their views on sexual ethics in the public arena at all? And if they should, how can they do so, when the Church is so divided internally on these issues?
-

Sex and power

Ephesians 5:22-33 – the Household Codes – identifies guidelines for the relationship between a husband and his wife. At the time the Codes were written, the law vested a great deal of power in the husband over his family. These passages have been interpreted by some to condone abuse by a man of his wife, which is at odds with the instruction for “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church” (Eph 5:25). And it is contrary to the spirit of verse 21 of this chapter which urges all Christians (male and female) to be subject (or submit) to one another out of reverence for Christ.

These studies have so far focused largely on consenting sexual relationships between adults. However, at the other end of the continuum are a range of behaviours where undue power is exercised including rape, paedophilia and incest. Such behaviours are condemned by the Church and society alike.

In New Zealand an average of 2,738 sexual assaults per annum have been recorded since 1995/96. Between 2008 and 2012, sexual abuse of children has averaged around 6.5 percent of the

abuse cases reported to Children, Youth and Families – some 1200 cases per annum.⁶

We have put a spotlight on sexual abuse in some of its more common forms here, because when considering sexual ethics it is important to consider the undue exercise of power, and recognise that these negative forms of sexual expression exist as well as the more positive aspects of sexual relationships.

The price society pays

The perspective that sexual expression is good regardless of marital status or gender – is reinforced in several powerful ways. Society has become highly sexualised. Every day – through movies, DVDs, internet, billboards, advertising, music and dress or its lack – people are exposed to more and more sexualised images.

We are increasingly living in a highly sexualised, permissive and tolerant society. How does this changing society affect how we understand marriage? For most, marriage is a post-cohabitation step, perhaps to mark greater commitment or to start a family. Around half of all babies are now born ex-nuptially.⁷ Statistics suggest that one-third of young people today will never marry, one-third will experience divorce, and only one-third will experience a marriage for life.⁸

While full accuracy is not possible, it is estimated that globally there are now 68 million daily pornography search engine requests and 1.5 billion pornography downloads per month.⁹ The consumption of pornography is made easier through technology, and increased access to pornography is a likely contributor to the sexualisation of our culture.

Increased promiscuity among young people is another consequence of living in a highly sexualised society. In New Zealand, we have one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the OECD.¹⁰

Sexual intimacy is a normal healthy function of life, but it is argued that the increasingly sexualised nature of our world is having a destructive effect on our ability to engage in loving, faithful relationships. Sexual dysfunction, anxiety about physical appearance, body shame, disordered eating and depression are among the effects on women that researchers have partly attributed to the objectification of women that is common in advertisements, television programmes, music lyrics, sports media, video games and more.¹¹

It is evident from the research that the changing sexual ethics landscape has far reaching implications for families, communities and society as a whole. The question is what can we do about this as churches, and as individuals?

For discussion

- » On sexuality issues, how can the Church maintain a distinctive voice without seeming Victorian or irrelevant? How do we do so without jettisoning scripture?
-



Case Study: What We Say to Young People About Sex and Love

Youth, child and families co-ordinator at Knox Presbyterian Waitara, Jennie McCullough, has seen many changes in the way young people approach sex and relationships since she started working in youth ministry more than 20 years ago.

Jennie observes that childhood innocence seems to be getting eroded and boy-girl relationships are often driven from a much younger age.

She believes that this is mainly due to earlier exposure to explicit and confusing facts about sex and sexuality which are easily accessed on the internet and smartphones and portrayed through television, music and the culture we live in.

Jennie also believes that the breakdown of the family unit is causing a lot of confusion about love and sex, sometimes leading young people to seek "love" in sexual relationships.

"Fathers need to know that they have a significant role in protecting and building the esteem of their children especially for their daughters.

"There is also a real focus these days among young people on letting your feelings take action now. An 'If it feels good, do it' kind of thinking, and 'deal with the consequences later' which isn't always healthy."

According to Jennie, same-sex attraction and pornography are issues that cause young people a lot of worry and lead them to question their own identity.

"Ideally the church provides a loving community which can model and develop the capacity and resilience for healthy relationships. We can play a significant role in helping families and young people engage in positive, loving relationships.

"To do this we need to be equipped to engage our young people in candid conversations, to really listen and get understanding.

"And instead of using a negative judgemental attitude, we need to have the heart and love of Christ and the courage to address the hard questions that are raised about sexuality and identity.

"Our children and young people need to know that sex is not a 'naughty' subject and that parents can be fearless in their open and honest discussions, after all it was God who designed sex to be good, beautiful and enjoyed in the context of marriage."

Are sexual ethics to be based on love alone?

The first study indicated that sexual ethics need to be based both on biblical texts and on a cohering theology that undergird the texts. Some argue that underneath all Christian precepts is the principle of love and that all texts need to be assessed in the light of love. Certainly this stance can claim biblical support. The two greatest commands are to love God and neighbour (Matt 22:34-40). And all divine requirements are summed up in the directive to love one's neighbour as oneself (Rom 13:10; Gal 5:14).

Texts like these give support to Joseph Fletcher's "situation ethics", which emerged in the 1960s: the notion that there are no hard-and-fast rules, apart from making the most loving decision in each particular situation: there are no absolute norms except that of love. Such a perspective challenged traditional Christian sexual ethics.

Should love alone be the judge? Situation ethics is arguably a one-sided and selective reading of the New Testament. Jesus, for example, while elevating love, also stressed law (Matt 5: 17-20).

And Paul named specific behaviours as contrary to the will of God (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21). This suggests that although law is subservient to love, it must be read alongside it – love and law. Yet, although situation ethics may be one-sided, its approach is valuable in offering a reminder that love must be considered, in fact be at the forefront, in Christian sexual ethics.

What happens before marriage?

A present reality to be faced is that living together before marriage, and pre-marital sex have become the norm in society and amongst most young people. Research indicates that each generation of New Zealanders has seen a greater proportion cohabit with a partner, rather than marry, as their first relationship.¹²

Often the exact status of these relationships is ill-defined. This type of situation spills over into the Church, bringing with it greyness and uncertainty. Today's uncertainties may not be ideal but are unlikely to change, so the real challenge is how we, as a Church, choose to engage with this reality.

Most of our congregations will include people in cohabiting partnership arrangements that are not legal marriages. The National Association of Evangelicals in the United States discussed this issue in a booklet, *A Theology of Sex*, in 2010:

"Increasingly, cohabiting couples come from Christian homes and profess Christianity. Church leaders have challenging choices: They can embrace a couple and disregard their choice to cohabit; embrace a couple while encouraging them to move toward marriage; or refuse fellowship to a couple as long as they continue to cohabit".¹³

In the past this would immediately raise issues of standards and Church discipline. In today's society the response is less clear-cut. Presbyterian parishes around the country are struggling with this very issue, and the possible responses are diverse as shown in the two case studies that follow.

Case Study: Maintaining Biblical Standards

In early 2014, Calvin Presbyterian in Gore removed a parish member from its roll because the individual was living in a de facto relationship. The decision attracted the interest of media, the public and churchgoers alike. Here, Calvin minister, the Rev Keith Hooker explains the session's decision.

Calvin is a reasonably large evangelical congregation that has always sought to uphold the Presbyterian Church's view of marriage and appropriate expressions of sexuality.

When it became obvious that one of our members was living in a de facto relationship, the elders felt obliged to talk with the person about the incompatibility of their circumstances with their promise to uphold a Christian lifestyle (Section 4:6 Book of Order). The process involved several amicable discussions, but ultimately met with some resistance and a decision to involve the media.

Session's choice to deal with this difficult pastoral situation was not taken lightly – not because the rights and wrongs of it were questionable, but because when we single out one person's sin we have to take a good look at ourselves. We have all failed in the past and will doubtless do so again, but session believes that the question that God puts to us is about our intention – Do we intend to “walk in the light as he is in the light”? If not then there is no basis for true fellowship with God or other believers (1 John 1:6-7).

I think ultimately we made the right decision for the following reasons:

- » The Biblical teaching on sexuality and the sanctity of marriage was counter-cultural in its day, as it is today, and yet the Bible is uncompromising on the subject.
- » Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32) The most redeeming thing we can do as Christians is to hold each other accountable to gospel values.
- » It seems somewhat hypocritical for the Church to teach one thing while its members practise another – we may rightly be accused of double standards.
- » Ultimately life is not about us and our rights – it's about the honour of God's name. Jesus is “truth” and we are called to uphold God's truth “...for his name sake”. (Psalm 23:3)

As a session we were very mindful of our responsibility to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15) and it was important for us to convey our ongoing commitment to this person. As a result we have maintained a constructive relationship with her and she has maintained her links with the congregation.

A few members of Calvin believed that we had acted in a judgmental way. Session wrote a pastoral letter to all members and made individual pastoral visits where that seemed appropriate. Since then we have maintained an open dialogue which has resolved most of the concerns.

Case Study: Engaging With Today's Reality

In this case study, the Rev Martin Stewart shares how he engages with the reality that for many Kiwis, living together and engaging in a sexual relationship, precedes rather than follows marriage.

In exercising my ministry, I have conducted well over 150 weddings. In only a few have I had any sense that for the couple concerned, their wedding night would be the first time that they would have sexual intercourse.

I remember when I was training, a minister coming and talking to my class about wedding preparation. He indicated that if he learned that the couple were already co-habiting he very strongly insisted that they separate until the ceremony had been conducted. I chose not to follow his lead. Instead of making an issue of this I decided to work with the couple as I found them, and help them to consider what differences being married in the eyes of God will bring to their relationship. I believe that I am not there to judge, I am there to open windows.

I have taken a similar approach on the few occasions when I have suspected that church members might be sexually active out of wedlock. I see my role as one of guiding people to a place of deep commitment to one another before God, rather than one of insisting on or policing traditional moral standards.

That there have been very few co-habiting church members in any church I have been part of, despite the high prevalence of this lifestyle choice in society at large, suggests to me that the church is not connecting well with society.

Rightly or wrongly, people believe that the church is only interested in making moral judgements and they stay away from us. While I believe that there is an important conversation to be had about what our human relationships mean in Christ, I think that there are other important issues at stake that have to be factored in, such as creating spaces that enable people to connect with God deeply and fully. If we focus on that bigger framework of connection, the other things generally fall into place.

This might shock some people, but I believe that sexuality issues in church and society should not dominate our national church life in the way they have for many years. I think that too much has been lost because the church has constantly reduced sexuality to a focus on individual morality.

In truth, people I have spent time with who co-habitate out of wedlock are much the same as people I meet who are married. They are incredibly open to talk about spiritual things and even why they have not chosen to get married. But that willingness to share is pre-determined by whether I am open to them. Interestingly, my meeting them where they are at, and even respecting their choices, also opens me to how God is already at work in their lives. They, like me, are people who wrestle with God. But this wrestling is not something I would have the opportunity to explore with them if they thought I had come in judgement of them!

For discussion

- » Is living together before marriage and pre-marital sex a betrayal of biblical Christian ethics? Why? Why not?
 - » When does marriage begin? Is it the ceremony that solidifies that which is in the heart? What makes a marriage, a marriage?
 - » How do you respond to the two possible approaches to managing pre-marital sex and co-habitation that are discussed here? Where do your sympathies lie? Why? What other options are there?
 - » Should the Church continue to maintain a blanket rejection of sex before marriage and living together before marriage? Why? Why not?
-

Mission challenge for the Church

One debate in the early Church was between Pelagius, who insisted that Christians ought to be perfect, and Augustine, who argued that the Church was to be like Noah's ark, a place for both the "clean" and the "unclean"; it was to be a hospital for the sick, and not just a haven for the saints.

Missionally, what does this debate between Pelagius and Augustine mean for the today's Church? Understanding that in New Zealand, it is now the norm for defacto cohabitation to be the first form of relationship for those who marry¹⁴, when does marriage begin? Are some long-term relationships actually marriage? Are we to refrain

from coming to judgment regarding attendees' (non) marital status? Or does it mean viewing some long-term partnerships (partnerships that have characteristics of permanence, fidelity and commitment) as marriage, albeit irregular marriage? What other options are there?

Another missional challenge is considering how we can be genuinely welcoming to people of all backgrounds. What would this look like?

For discussion

- » Consider different ways of beginning marriage in different centuries. What situations would you recognise as "marriage" or "irregular marriage"?
 - » Given the Church's diversity of opinion on sexual ethics, where are the points of commonality? What do we stand together on?
 - » What do you think of Church being like Noah's ark, with "clean" and "unclean" mixed together?
 - » How can our churches maintain standards and also be genuinely welcoming of people in all kinds of situations?
 - » General Assembly made a decision that those in de facto relationships or same-sex relationships were not suitable candidates for leadership. What do you think about extending this decision to church members?
-

JAMES 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Standards for church leaders

Should a more spacious approach to marriage and co-habitation apply, however, to Christian *leaders*? Such people have a significant role in modelling the gospel and Christian ethics and influencing others. A number of scriptures suggest that a higher standard is called for with regard to Christian leaders (Jam 3.1; 1 Tim 3.2).

In terms of sexuality this suggests that church leaders should be either celibate, or in a faithful, married relationship. Indeed recent rulings by General Assembly state that we may not accept for training, licensing, ordination or induction, anyone involved in a sexual relationship outside of faithful, marriage between a man and a woman.

The standard of behaviour expected of church leaders is very high. During ministry training as well as post-ordination, Presbyterian ministers receive formal instruction in the areas of risk assessment and ethics. Despite this, a small number of allegations of sexual misconduct are received each year, and any discussion on sexual ethics would be incomplete without acknowledgement of this.

For discussion

- » Why should we hold leaders to a higher or tighter standard than ordinary church members?

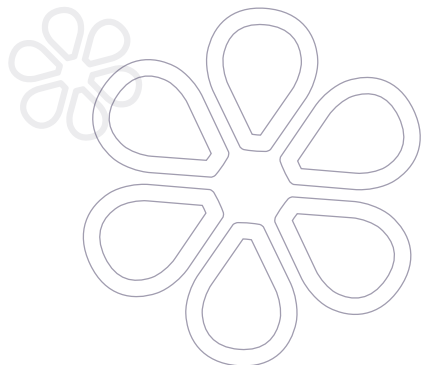
For reflection

Read Galatians 5:16-26

1. Paul seemed to note a sharp distinction between living according to the flesh/sinful nature and living according to the Spirit. What do you think of that?
2. Paul urges us to live by the Spirit and not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. How can a Christian live by the Spirit?

Read Ephesians 5:21-33

3. These Household codes identify the guidelines for a relationship between husband and wife. How do you respond to the codes of behaviour set out here?



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Resources For Group Leaders



Resources For Group Leaders

Code of Ethics for Pastoral Care

The Code of Ethics establishes the standard (including ministers, lay persons and any others) expected of those in the Church who undertake the work of pastoral care in its name. <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-parishes/code-of-ethics>

Risk Management and Ethics in the Church

Risk management and ethics resources and workshops are available to support church leaders in their work. Contact your presbytery to find out when the next workshop will be held in your area.

Safety in Youth Ministry

Presbyterian Youth Ministry publish *Safety in Youth Ministry* which outlines guidelines for maintaining physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual safety when working with young people. <http://www.pym.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/youth-safety.pdf>

Safety in Children's Ministry

Kids Friendly have prepared a resource, *Safety in Children's Ministry*, that contains guidelines, strategies and sample policies to keep children and leaders safe physically, psychologically and sexually. <http://www.kidsfriendly.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/Safety-in-Childrens-Ministry-2013.pdf>

Modern sexuality issues

Discussion papers, submissions and resources on modern sexual ethics issues including fertility treatments, sex selection are more available at www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz

Christian Perspectives on Marriage: A Discussion Document

Download this resource from the Presbyterian Church website at: http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/public_files/PCANZ-marriage_2014.pdf

Reading the Bible for Ethical Guidance

The following resources may assist group leaders, and other users of this study guide, to grapple with the question "How do we read the Bible for ethical guidance today?".

Some General Resources

All of the following books are available via the Hewitson Library. If you live outside Dunedin, a postal service is available. Please email hewitson@knoxcollege.ac.nz to register for library membership and place a request.

Gordon Fee and **Douglas Stuart**, *How To Read The Bible For All It's Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Zondervan, 2014) is a well-known and frequently recommended resource which has an initial chapter on the need to interpret, then focuses on how to understand the different biblical genres.

Howard Hendricks and **William Hendricks**, offer a very good resource on how to study the Bible: *Living By The Book: the Art and Science of Bible Reading* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1991). The book uses the framework of observation, interpretation and application. The "interpretation" section covers content, context, comparison, culture and consultation.

Miroslav Volf, provides a very helpful guide to reading the Bible as a basis for theological thinking in his book, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) The first two chapters "Reading the Bible Theologically", and "Theology for a Way of Life" provide a general introduction to the theme, and the remaining four chapters provide specific examples.

David Ford and **Graham Stanton** are the editors of a book called *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) that gathers together some very helpful essays from a range of authors about how we may read Scripture.

In *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), **Joel B. Green** offers an accessible account of what it means to read Scripture as the Word of God and to do so with the intent that we will be shaped and transformed by that Word.

Reading Scripture with the Church (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) is a challenging but important book in which four contemporary scholars, **A.K.M. Adam**, **Stephen Fowl**, **Kevin Vanhoozer** and **Francis Watson**, develop together an account of how we may read the Bible theologically.

Biblical interpretation and ethics

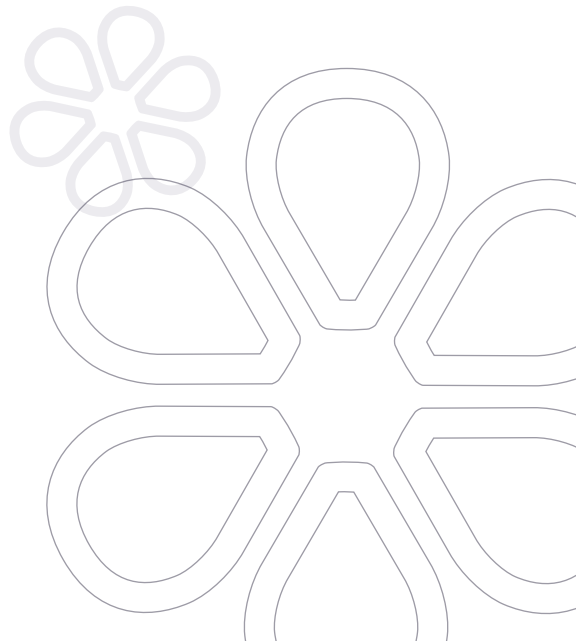
The following works provide more specific guidance on reading the Bible in the context of ethical decision-making.

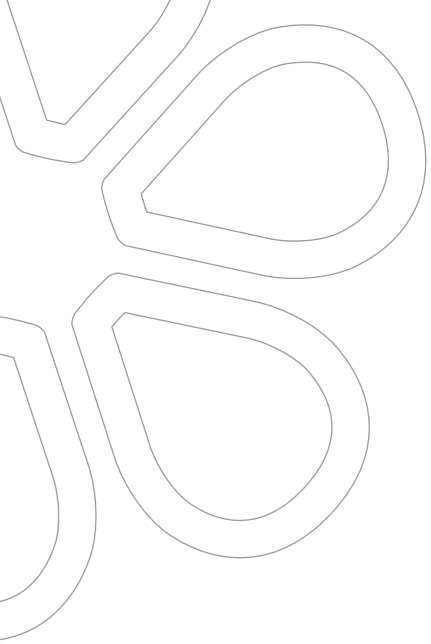
Among the most highly regarded of such works is **Richard B. Hays**, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996). Hays' work includes a chapter on homosexuality.

Angus Paddison, his book *Scripture: A Very Theological Proposal* (London: T&T Clark, 2009) includes a chapter on scripture, the Church and ethics that provides a very helpful discussion of scripture, not as something that we "use" in making ethical decisions, but rather as something that we are formed by.

Bruce Birch, provides some helpful guidance at a general level about reading the Bible in the context of ethical decision making in his article "Scripture in Ethics: Methodological Issues" in Joel B. Green, ed. *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) 27-34, and in the same volume Allen Verhey has an essay titled "Ethics in Scripture" that provides an overview of the field. See pp. 5-11.

The same *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* includes articles on "Sex and Sexuality" and "Sexual Ethics" by **Erin Dufault-Hunter**, and on "Sexual Abuse" and "Sexual Harassment" by **Kristen J. Leslie**.









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