

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together. The hand on the left is wearing a long-sleeved shirt with a vibrant, multi-colored plaid pattern. The hand on the right is wearing a plain, light-colored long-sleeved shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sunset or sunrise, with warm golden light filtering through trees, creating a bokeh effect. The overall mood is peaceful and supportive.

THE GOSPEL AND SEXUALITY

*Sex, Sexuality and Identity and the
Kingdom of God*

THE GOSPEL IN SEXUALITY

“For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others – and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.” – Jesus, Matthew 19:12

This paper will outline an approach to sexuality, and sexual identity, in the light of the Gospel, especially regarding Jesus’ teaching about the relationship between the kingdom of God and human sexuality.

It approaches sexuality as a mix of:

- **sexual identity:** how someone identifies themselves according to their orientation and expression – this is not necessarily defined by one’s sex,¹ but rather the label one adopts to describe their sexuality, so “I am heterosexual”, “I am homosexual,” “I am bisexual”
- **sexual orientation:** how someone understands their sexual attraction,
- **and sexual expression** how someone participates in sexual activity.

A biblical and theological survey will make the following points.

- A person’s relationship with God is the primary foundation for human identity. We were created male and female, *made in the image of God*, and are fully human on that basis.
- Humans were created male and female, *to relate to each other in community*, and, *to be joined in marriage, as one flesh with another person* of the opposite sex, as an expression of the self-giving, loving relationship between persons of the Trinity, with the potential outcome of producing children. These relationships are important for questions of identity, but are secondary to the creator-creature relationship.
- Sexual expression is a good gift from God, and marriage is also good gift from God, and is the created context for joyful sexual expression.
- The Fall damages our understanding of human identity, and our relationships with God and each other. We are now likely to seek to base our identity on things other than God, idols. Our natural experiences of the world, and our humanity, are experiences of the fallen, broken world. This damage extends to sexual identity, orientation, and expression, in all human relationships, including within marriage.
- Finding our identity in anything other than relationship with God, in his created order, is idolatry, and that sexual expression flowing from idolatry earns God’s judgment.
- Jesus came as the true human, the image of the invisible God, and the true basis for human identity, affirming the created order, while remaining single. A right approach to sexuality (as it relates to identity and expression, but not orientation) flows from his life, his teaching, his death, his resurrection, and his Lordship.
- Jesus offers hope to the broken – including those who have experienced, or continue to experience, broken human sexuality and relationships, so long as one continues to find their identity in his wholeness, rather than our own brokenness, or attempts at wholeness apart from him.
- The Bible offers a transformed approach to sexuality – both expression and identity – as a result of a heart transformed by the Spirit, and an

¹ The committee will be producing a subsequent paper on the Gospel and Gender.

individual's transformation as they are conformed to the image of Christ. Such transformation may include a shift in sexual orientation, but this is not necessary for sexual wholeness, or for a Christian identity.

Implications of this framework for the questions and situations in our society today will then be considered.

THE GOSPEL AND SEXUALITY: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CREATION AND SEXUALITY

God's first people – Adam and Eve – were made to bear God's image, given the job of working in his creation, as his representatives.² Adam and Eve were God's appointed rulers, co-creators, and children,³ carrying out his work. Being made in Bearing God's image is foundational to human identity and is both *relational* and *vocational*. Adam and Eve had a job to do, as an outworking of who they were made to be, who they were made by and for - *God*, and who they were placed with – *each other*.

According to Genesis, males and females are both made in God's image, they are people, they are connected to their creator and given this image bearing vocation, and a sex, and these are aspects of their humanity and personhood before two – male and female - become one flesh in marriage.⁴ Marriage is a good gift from God, but it flows from our personhood, it is not a foundation for personhood. Human relationships, especially marriage, flow from being made as a relational being bearing the image of a relational, Triune, God. Individuals are not half a person waiting for their match, but “one flesh” both before, and without being combined with another person.⁵

Sexuality is a part of, but not the foundation of, our human identity. This matches our lived experience of the world, from birth to adulthood and sexual maturity. People are fully human at every step in that process.

THE FALL AND SEXUALITY

Our ability to carry the image of God was frustrated in the event known as “The Fall,” where human nature including our sexuality, was broken.⁶ Though *sexuality* and *sexual expression* were good creations from God, our human nature, and human relationships, were *frustrated* and broken when humanity rejected God. Human nature now obscures the image of God, so what appears natural and desirable in terms of our *sexual orientation* may not represent the created order or God's desire for human *sexual expression*.

The first chapter of Romans explores the implications of the Fall for how we think of personhood, human identity, sexuality, and sexual expression. One result is that what appears to be *natural*, and therefore, *good* can no longer definitively said to be good for human flourishing, in fact, what appears to be natural leads to judgment and

² Gen 2:15, See G.K Beale, 'Eden, Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 48/1 (March 2005), 5-31

³ Luke 3:38 describes Adam as “the son of God”

⁴ Gen 1:27-28, 2:21-24

⁵ Genesis 2:14

⁶ Gen 3

condemnation from the creator.⁷ When we reject God, and look to *anything-but-God* for our identity – worshipping images of created things, not being images of the creator – this has implications for our understanding of personhood and sexuality.

When we find our identity in idols, not God, these idols shape our understanding of personhood, *sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexual expression*.⁸

Sexual expression outside of its intended context is the broken product of a broken human nature, and this brokenness affects all people, regardless of *sexual orientation*. *Sexual orientation* can appear “natural” and be said to be “unchosen.” This does not necessarily mean that *sexual expression* flowing from that orientation is *good* (assessed either in terms of *promoting human flourishing or morality*).

CREATION, THE FALL, AND MARRIAGE

While every aspect of our humanity is now broken, *sexuality* for every one of us is now subject to the tension between our dual nature as people who are both made in God’s image, and broken by sin such that we naturally reject God.⁹ We still enjoy the fruits of loving, committed, relationships with others - even as we experience frustration in these relationships.

As the type human relationship set aside for sexual expression, marriage – the one flesh union between one male and one female – is a good gift from God, to all people. Marriage expresses something about the relational nature of the Triune God. Despite the Fall, and being tainted by sin, marriage is still the appropriate context for expressing self-giving love between a man and a woman in union (two people as one flesh). Marriage will *profoundly affect* a person’s identity, but is not the basis for identity.

Marriage between one male and one female expresses the complementarity involved in the eternal self-giving, life-creating, loving relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and is a profound way that humans bear the image of the Triune God. In its ideal form the marriage relationship between husband and wife points to the relationship between Christ and his Church.

Marriage between one man and one woman is still the created context, and God’s good design, for producing and nurturing children who will have one mother and one father. The Fall means our experience of marriage and parenting won’t be what it was created to be, and we will experience various frustrations and fracture in human relationships as a result of the frustration and fracturing of our relationship with God. When human family relationships are fractured, God graciously provides a wider network of loving relationships, especially in the context of his family, the Church.

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND SEXUALITY

The story of the Old Testament is a story of brokenness – including sexual brokenness - and God’s faithful love in the face of brokenness, and his commitment to redeem the world.

God, throughout the Old Testament, called his people, Israel, to a different standard of sexual behaviour. Israel’s neighbours were sexually promiscuous, pursuing apparently

⁷ Romans 1:18, 21-23, 32, 3:23, 6:23

⁸ Romans 1:21-31

⁹ Romans 7:18-21

natural desires. The laws of the Old Testament called Israel to live differently from the people around them – including in what they believed was appropriate sexual expression, they were not to be like Canaan or Egypt,¹⁰ engaging in adultery,¹¹ and homosexuality,¹² as these were clearly inconsistent with the created order. Israel's distinctive – their "holiness" – is based on the nature of the God who called them,¹³ and designed to allow them to function as his representatives, his kingdom of priests, recapturing something of what was lost at The Fall.¹⁴

The Old Testament, including the Law, calls Israel to limit sexual expression to marriage, but also, through the narrative of Israel's history, shows how difficult the Law's standards are to maintain, exploring the tension between living life as image bearers pointing people to God's character, and living lives as broken people. The *heroes* of the Old Testament story are constantly caught up in sexual immorality including prostitution (Judah, Genesis 38), adultery (Abraham giving his wife to Pharaoh, Genesis 12:10-20, Samson and Delilah, Judges 16, King David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11), polygamy (Solomon), and other forms of sexual immorality. These failings are portrayed as a cause for the judgment of individuals and God's people collectively (2 Samuel 12:7-14, 1 Kings 11), and a symbol of humanity's unfaithfulness to God the creator (Hosea). The Old Testament describes this behaviour without affirming it. Sexual expression outside of marriage demonstrates that Israel's commitment to being God's people is not what it should be, sexual immorality and idolatry (often linked) are the two big indicators that humanity, Israel, and individuals from Israel's history were not living the lives they were created for, and that they desperately need intervention from God.

JESUS AND SEXUALITY

While the Old Testament paints the picture of the broken nature of man – especially using examples of sexuality and idolatry (where we give aspects of creation the affection and worship we owe to God as creator), and establishes the need for God to intervene to restore human nature, the New Testament provides the solution for this situation, offering *not just restoration* of the created order and the reversal of the frustration of the Fall, *but renovation* and transformation of our humanity, including our understanding of personhood and sexuality.

Jesus speaks clearly on marriage and sexuality in a way that affirms its connection to the created order. While some argue that his silence on divergent forms of sexual expression, such as homosexuality, is relevant to the debate, there was no need for him to speak against a practice that his Jewish audience already believed was against God's natural order, and unlawful.¹⁵ While Jesus affirms the created order, when questioned about marriage, he also makes it clear that sexual identity and expression come second, when it comes to identity, to the question of whether or not a person is part of God's kingdom.

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." – Matthew 19:4-6

¹⁰ Leviticus 18:3-4

¹¹ Leviticus 18:6-20, 23

¹² Leviticus 18:22

¹³ Leviticus 19:2

¹⁴ Exodus 19:3-6

¹⁵ Matthew 5:17-20

“Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.” – Matthew 19:11-12

In this passage it is also worth noticing that Jesus affirms that people *are born with a particular sexual orientation, or identity, while others may choose not to identify with, or express, their natural sexual orientation* for the sake of the kingdom.

Jesus also makes it clear that marriage between a man and a woman is a good thing, but not an ultimate thing, because it does not last into the New Creation.¹⁶

What is clear from Israel’s story in the Old Testament is that our fallen nature makes it very difficult for one’s sexual identity and sexual expression to be shaped by a political reality, without intervention. Jesus’ explanation of the Law regarding adultery at the Sermon on the Mount makes it clear exactly how hard it is to meet the standards of the Law.¹⁷ The standards of behaviour, including sexual behaviour,¹⁸ he sets are so high that it becomes clear that he is the only human in history to have met them, and clear that like in the Old Testament, our sexual conduct (in thought and deed) reveals that we need some intervention from God.

Jesus speaks against lust, as a form of adultery,¹⁹ but a distinction must be made between experiencing temptation as a result of orientation, and submitting to that temptation turning it into thought (lust) or sexual expression, it is in the latter category that culpability rests.²⁰ Jesus, himself, was without sin, but has been “tempted in every way.”²¹ This means that chastity – be it in the context of singleness, or in limiting sexual expression to the context of a marriage between one man and one woman – is the goal of human sexuality.²²

The hope of renovation, or re-creation, of ourselves, including our sexuality, is one of the implications of the Gospel. This hope is found in Jesus Christ, the perfect human.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God.²³ He is the new Adam,²⁴ the one greater than David,²⁵ and Solomon.²⁶

The God who created humanity carries out this renovation project *through* and *in* Jesus. Those who become children of God again are conformed to the image of Jesus, and

¹⁶ Matthew 22:23-33

¹⁷ Matthew 5:17-20

¹⁸ Matthew 5:27-30

¹⁹ Matthew 5:27-30

²⁰ R.A. Nelson, ‘Homosexuality and social ethics.’ *Word & World* 5, no. 4 (September 1, 1985): 380-394, 381, T. Paterson, ‘An introduction to the ethics of homosexuality,’ *Journal Of Theology For Southern Africa*, no. 48 (September 1, 1984): 45-54, 45

²¹ Hebrews 4:15

²² S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research*, S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal, “the Christian moral argument about homosexuality does not stand or fall on the possibility of “conversion” of sexual orientation, because in the end the Christian moral demand is not orientation change but rather, at a minimum, “chaste behavior.”* The best current study into the effectiveness of change therapy, S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation*, (Downers Grove, IVP, 2007), suggests this is a more realistic outcome for therapy.

²³ Colossians 1:15

²⁴ Romans 5:14, 1 Cor 15:45-49

²⁵ Matt 22:45

²⁶ Matt 12:42

glorifies us.²⁷ We are united with Christ, and transformed by the Holy Spirit,²⁸ able, once again, to function as God's representatives, called to find our identity not in the flesh – or our sexuality – but in Jesus.²⁹ This has radical ramifications for our sexual identity and for sexual expression for those in Christ.³⁰

Following Jesus changes our identity, our understanding of sexuality, and our approach to sexual expression because the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts and minds, so that we worship God again, not idols, it frees us to pursue the sexuality of the Kingdom of God, not just the created order, but the new creation order.

Attempts to transform our sexual expression without addressing questions of identity and idolatry are ultimately likely to end in frustration for those without the Holy Spirit. It will also involve some measure of frustration for those with the Spirit, because God's kingdom, the new creation, is not yet fully realised. The frustration and brokenness of creation is still a reality.³¹ Attempting to live out a Christian approach to sexuality is an expression of our hope.³²

The good news of the Gospel is that no matter how broken we were, or are, whatever stage we are at in the process of being transformed into the image of Jesus, God's forgiveness is offered freely to individuals through him. We are no longer facing guilt and shame for our brokenness, or our experience of the brokenness of others, but forgiveness from the love of the God who created all things, and the hope of a better future in an unbroken world.³³

This theological framework, in our view, represents the framework that the Apostle Paul brings to sexual ethics in his letters to the early church, and this framework and his approach will help us as we navigate issues emerging in our society today.

THE GOSPEL AND SEXUALITY IN SOCIETY TODAY: SOME ISSUES

THE GOSPEL AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

Christians in Australia have too easily conformed to the modern western world's view that sexuality is the foundational defining feature of human identity.³⁴ We often, in our speech and practice, treat heterosexuality as the norm, as though such normality is untainted by sin, we implicitly or explicitly treat sexual expression within the context of marriage as the desired goal for every human life, ignoring the fact that Jesus was unmarried, and celibate (as was Paul).

It seems odd to establish categories of human identity that dehumanise Jesus. Sexuality, be it identity, orientation, or expression, cannot be fundamental to human identity.

²⁷ Romans 8:9-30

²⁸ 2 Cor 3:18, John 17:20-23, Rom 6:4, 1 Cor 6:12-20, 1 John 4:7-11, 2 Peter 1:3-11

²⁹ Romans 8:9-13, also Rom 5:12-21, 8:29, 12:15 1 Cor 15:20-23, 49, 2 Cor 3:18, 5:17, Gal 3:26-28, Eph 2:10

³⁰ Romans 6, 15:20-28, 30-35, 42-49, Gal 2:20, 4:13-26, Col 1:21-22, 2:6-15, 3:1-16, 1 Cor 6:11, 1 Thes 4:1-7

³¹ Romans 8:18-23

³² Romans 8:22-27

³³ Romans 8:31-39

³⁴ J.W Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity*, "Sexual identity is a Western, nineteenth-century formulation of what it means to be human. It's grounded in a belief that the direction of one's sexual desire is identity-constituting, earning each individual a label (gay, lesbian, straight, etc.) and social role."

A Christian conception of human identity can not be based on sexual expression as this would not only exclude Jesus, but also children, and those who are single, by design or circumstance, widowed, asexual, or impotent, them as somehow less human than those who are married.

The Gospel makes it clear that Jesus, and his kingdom, are the basis for human identity according to the Creator,³⁵ not sexuality. There are interesting implications for the idea of sexual identity being shaped by our identity in Christ in Matthew, where Jesus speaks of those who choose to be eunuchs for the Kingdom (he seems to be using this to describe a sexuality, encompassing identity and expression and the transformation of orientation, presumably those ‘choosing to be eunuchs’ are not oriented as eunuchs). This has radical ramifications for the place of sexuality in the believer’s identity.³⁶ Sexuality, and other forms of identity apart from Jesus are idolatry.³⁷

Freedom to be sexually and relationally whole – no longer a slave to the flesh – is part of the good news of the Christian gospel.³⁸ Freedom to find, and choose, an identity apart from one’s *unchosen* sexual orientation, in a culture that insists sexuality defines who we are is something Christians can advocate for in discussions of issues surrounding sexuality.

THE GOSPEL AND ‘BORN THIS WAY’

One of the big questions confronting Christians in Australia is whether people are ‘born gay’ or, indeed, born with a default sexual identity produced by a default sexual orientation. The assumption, as outlined in the Lady Gaga hit *Born This Way*, is that people are as God made them, God made people in his image, therefore a natural orientation is created by God.

*I’m beautiful in my way
‘Cause God makes no mistakes
I’m on the right track, baby
I was born this way – Lady Gaga, Born This Way*

This view misses the Fall, that vital piece in the Bible’s story of redemption. The moment that leaves human nature broken, oriented away from God, such that we are born sinful. Our nature corrupted. We are born slaves to sin and the flesh.³⁹ Such a view of human nature means a same sex orientation poses no threat to a view of sexuality based not just in the created order, but also in the transformation brought by the Holy Spirit through the death and resurrection of Jesus. When we speak of sexuality being a choice, the evidence, including accounts from brothers and sisters in Christ who are same sex attracted, suggests that orientation is not chosen, that it is a product of a complex range of factors often beyond the individual’s control, including environment,⁴⁰ and, potentially,

³⁵ Rom 5:12-21, 8:29, 12:15 1 Cor 15:20-23, 49, 2 Cor 3:18, 5:17, Gal 3:26-28, Eph 2:10, A. Cameron, *Joined Up Life*, 95-96

³⁶ Romans 6, 15:20-28, 30-35, 42-49, Gal 2:20, 4:13-26, Col 1:21-22, 2:6-15, 3:1-16, 1 Cor 6:11, 1 Cor 7:32-35, 1 Thes 4:1-7, A. Cameron, *Joined Up Life*, 73

³⁷ A. Cameron, *Joined Up Life*, 288-293

³⁸ Romans 1:16-17

³⁹ Romans 7:14-24, Romans 8:1-14

⁴⁰ S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate*, “Many psychological theories look at the parent-child relationship, early childhood development, early homosexual experiences and childhood sexual abuse.” S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal Study*, in a survey of 882 individuals dealing with unwanted same sex attraction, “520 (almost 60%) reported having had a childhood homosexual contact at an average age of 10.9 years, with the person initiating that contact being an average age of 17.2 years.”

genetics. While the evidence for a biological determinant is presently weak, such evidence would not be contrary to a Christian anthropology, but support the argument that sin is hard wired into our humanity as a result of The Fall.⁴¹ This also fits with Jesus' words regarding eunuchs for the kingdom.

While sexual orientation should not be spoken of as a choice, sexual identity, and sexual expression, also aspects of sexuality, are choices, and must be protected as exercises of individual freedom. Those seeking not to express their unchosen orientation, or identify themselves accordingly, are often stigmatised or questioned in conversations surrounding sexuality. The dominant narrative in our society is one of biological determinism, a form of slavery to the flesh.⁴²

This insight into human sexuality is not limited to homosexual orientation, all natural human sexuality, apart from sexuality transformed by Jesus, is broken. We are all born sexually broken, wherever our orientation sits on the spectrum. The gospel offers freedom from slavery to the flesh.⁴³

THE GOSPEL AND CHASTITY

One pastoral care issue created by the Church walking in lockstep with society when it comes to sexuality and identity, and dressing this up theologically, especially when defending the 'sanctity of marriage,' is that it often results in holding marriage out as the desired goal for every person, where each person must search for a spouse to complete them. This implicit view has the potential to shape Christian communities in a manner that alienates those who are single, either by choice, or circumstance.

Paul, single himself, upholds the definition and goodness of marriage, especially as the context for sexual expression,⁴⁴ while simultaneously claiming that singleness is desirable for sake of God's kingdom and the advance of the gospel.⁴⁵

The way we speak about sexuality, and marriage, in the public and private spheres has an impact on our single brothers and sisters, and shapes the culture of our communities. We must affirm that a fulfilled, joyful, celibate life within a loving community of people united in Christ is a real possibility.⁴⁶

⁴¹ S.L Jones, and A. W. Kwee, 'Scientific research, homosexuality, and the church's moral debate: an update,' *Journal Of Psychology And Christianity* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 304-316, 304-312, M.A Grisanti, 'Cultural and medical myths about homosexuality,' *Master's Seminary Journal* 19, no. 2 (September 1, 2008): 175-202, 185, 201-202, J.W Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity*, S.J Pope, 'Scientific and Natural Law Analyses of Homosexuality,' 97-99, J.R Beck, 'Evangelicals, Homosexuality, and Social Science,' 89-95, M.A. Yarhouse, 'Homosexuality, ethics, and identity synthesis,' *Christian Bioethics* 10, no. 2-3 (August 1, 2004): 239-257, 241, S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*, Location 262-268, 672-835, M. Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics*, (Sydney, Matthias Media, 2002), J.W Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity*

⁴² S.J Pope, 'Scientific and Natural Law Analyses of Homosexuality : A Methodological Study,' *Journal Of Religious Ethics* 25, no. 1 (March 1, 1997): 89-126, 90-91, 100 "As the reader will see, scientific findings and theories about the naturalness of homosexuality will be held to be relevant to but not definitive of the kind of moral assessment of sexual activity among homosexuals that is appropriate to natural law ethics... Proponents of one position, found in secular as well as in some religious ethics, argue that by overturning the traditional notion that homosexuality is unnatural, science destroys the basis for the traditional moral prohibition of homosexual acts."

⁴³ Rom 8:4-9, Gal 5:13

⁴⁴ 1 Cor 7:1-6, 9-16, 36-39

⁴⁵ 1 Cor 7:7-8, 27-35, 40

⁴⁶ A. Cameron, *Joined Up Life*, 297, "To be in Christ is to realise that our sexual self-identity isn't an adequate summary of who we really are, and of who God intends for us to be. We discover reasons to believe that both chaste singleness and faithful marriage are liveable and good." M.A. Yarhouse, 'Homosexuality, ethics, and identity synthesis,' 247-253 outlines the psychological process of "identity synthesis" somebody looking to recreate their identity might go through.

THE GOSPEL AND SEXUAL BROKENNESS

We are all sexually broken. Our sinful nature extends to every one of our activities. The experience of sexuality in this world is not what it was created to be. This brokenness means sexual expression, in many forms, causes significant damage to people. There are many easy examples of sexual brokenness in our society from the increasingly casual approach to casual sex (there's an app for that), the risk of contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections, relationship breakdown, adultery, pornography, prostitution, sex trafficking, rape, and other forms of sexual abuse, including the abuse of children, but also within the parameters of heterosexual marriage where sex can be abused for selfish reasons.

The brokenness of human sexuality does not simply create perpetrators and victims, but victims who perpetrate, and victims who are broken. Sin is destructive, sexual sin is destructive in a particularly notable way, in 1 Corinthians Paul says that sexual expression is both physical and spiritual, and that it affects us differently as a "sin against our own body."⁴⁷

There is a growing body of evidence examining the damage that the consumption of pornography does to our brains, to our relationships, and to those featured in material (who are often coerced, or enslaved, the link between pornography and human trafficking is well established).

An incredible percentage of women in Australia have been, or will be, sexually assaulted. This number is growing.

At the time of writing a Royal Commission is taking place into institutional responses to child sexual abuse, which has again established the connection between church run institutions and the abuse of children.

While these are significant, and obvious, examples of the brokenness of sexual expression in this world – even sexual expression within marriage is broken when it is an exercise of selfishness, control, or idolatry.

The Gospel is good news to the sexually broken. Both victims and perpetrators. It is good news for victims because it promises judgment and renewal, a removal of shame, life in new, resurrected, perfected bodies. It is good news for perpetrators – no matter how great the crime – because the death of Jesus is sufficient to provide forgiveness for all types of past sexual sin, and God promises to begin a work of transformation, or rehabilitation, in the life of the believer, through the Holy Spirit, in the context of Christian community.

THE GOSPEL AND MARRIAGE

We believe that marriage, between one man and one woman, is a one flesh relationship, uniting anatomically compatible individuals in a physical union consistent with the pre-fall "created order," that provides the appropriate context for producing, and raising, children.

We also believe that marriage is the coming together of two sexually broken, sinful, individuals, where each party brings complex issues to a complex relationship.

⁴⁷ 1 Cor 6:18

Marriage, as the appropriate context for sexual expression, is not the solution to sexual brokenness, or a healthy sexuality. Jesus is. The individual submitting themselves and their sexuality to the Lordship of Jesus and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, is the key to sexual wholeness. Failing to recognize this often leads to the idolatry of marriage, or the unhealthy belief, within a marriage, that a husband or wife is responsible for their spouse's transformation.

THE GOSPEL AND THE LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN SEXUAL ETHICS

The Bible takes sexual immorality very seriously. Fleeing it is to be one of the defining markers of the people of God's kingdom. Paul says broken sexual expression earns God's judgment,⁴⁸ and should not be tolerated within the church.⁴⁹

While sexual purity is a *major* concern for Christians, says the sexual morality of non-Christians is their own concern, in the light of God's judgment,⁵⁰ and he expects us to continue to associate with non-Christians without expecting them to behave with a Christian sexual morality.⁵¹

This means we must be careful in how we enter conversations about human sexuality outside the church. Our desire should be that our neighbours will see the way we live transformed lives, and hear us speak of God's good design for human relationships and sexuality. However, we must approach these conversations mindful of the gap between how we understand sexuality by God's gracious provision of the Holy Spirit, and how our world understands sexuality. Rather than presenting our neighbours with a sexual morality devoid of the good news of Jesus' renovation of our humanity, we must carefully hold out the good news that Jesus is the path to sexual wholeness.

The gospel of Jesus Christ transforms those who follow Jesus as Lord – so that we are no longer defined by our desires, our sexual expression, or any sin. We are defined by the infinite value and worth afforded to us by the God who made us as his own and the savior who died on our behalf to restore our human identity, centred on him. This is good news. It is accepting this good news that leads to a transformation of our sexuality.

THE GOSPEL AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The Old Testament is unequivocal in its condemnation of any sexual expression outside the context of marriage, including homosexual expression. The New Testament maintains this position that homosexual sexual expression – whether in the context of a 'gay marriage' or not is outside the created order.

Some modern scholars have suggested that Paul writes only of sexual expression in the context of Rome, where such practice was linked to idolatry or an expression of power, that he had no sense of sexuality as we understand it, in terms of orientation identity, and expression. Paul's objection to homosexual expression comes in the context of objections to idolatry, while these scholars suggest a fairly narrow understanding of idolatry that is limited to worship in temples, Paul's definition of idolatry as worshipping created things not the creator seems broad, and would appear to include the idolatry of sex itself, not simply sex as a product of idolatrous practice.⁵²

⁴⁸ 1 Cor 6:9-10

⁴⁹ 1 Cor 5:11

⁵⁰ 1 Cor 5:12

⁵¹ 1 Cor 5:9-10

⁵² Romans 1:21-27

If, as the above suggests, making your *sexual identity* the basis for your identity – ie, choosing to define oneself according to one’s sexuality, rather than in Christ, is a form of idolatry, then this is true for a homosexual sexual identity. Even if Paul is unaware of a modern understanding of sexuality, he is quite aware of the danger of sexuality as idolatry. All sexual expression is the product of a sexuality, and sexual identity, the Gospel calls us to submit our sexuality and sexual identity to Jesus, to define ourselves in the light of the Gospel story.

Such an understanding of the Biblical data does not make a homosexual orientation worthy of condemnation, and we must be incredibly careful in conversations about homosexuality to make this distinction for the sake of brothers and sisters in Christ who are same sex attracted and seeking to faithfully find their identity in Jesus, and have their sexuality defined by his kingdom not their orientation.

THE GOSPEL AND ‘REPARATIVE THERAPY’

When Paul speaks about sexual immorality – including homosexual expression, and in the context of speaking of idolatrous identity, Paul of the transforming power of the gospel and the hope of real change.

“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Cor 6:11

We want to affirm what the Bible says at this point – that Jesus is powerful to change us, and that the Holy Spirit brings real change to those who believe the Gospel. This is true for all sexual brokenness, and for each individual whose sexual identity has not been transformed by the Gospel. The Bible wouldn’t tell us to flee sexual immorality if this were not possible – be it lust, pornography or sexual addiction, prostitution, adulterous relationships, or other sexual expression outside of the context of marriage, or a sexual identity apart from Jesus involving expressions of our sinful hearts. The Gospel promises transformation of our sexuality, over time, as we are conformed to the image of Christ.

This is particularly controversial in our society when it comes to those Christians who are same sex attracted, but seeking to redefine their sexuality.

*The right wing conservatives think it’s a decision
And you can be cured with some treatment and religion
Man-made rewiring of a predisposition
Playing God, aw nah here we go – Macklemore, Same Love*

Historically, homosexuality was considered a psychological disorder by leading psychological authorities and there is a long history – both religious and secular – of treating homosexuality with various forms of what is called ‘reparative therapy.’ Now such reparative therapy is considered by these organisations, and the public, to be harmful, and a ‘hateful’ promotion of homophobia.⁵³ Some attempts to ‘cure’

⁵³ S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research* M.A. Yarhouse, ‘Homosexuality, ethics, and identity synthesis,’ 242, S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal Study*, Also The Australian Psychological Society (APS), ‘Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality,’ http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/orientation, Australian Psychological Society, ‘APS Position Statement on the Use of Therapies that Attempt to Change Sexual Orientation,’ 2000, http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/reparative_therapy.pdf, American Psychological Association,

homosexuality through reparative therapy focus on every aspect of a homosexual sexuality – identity, orientation, and expression.

The Gospel does not require transformation of one's sexual orientation, but one's identity, and this will lead to a transformation of sexual expression.

The transformation of one's sexual identity wrought by the Holy Spirit may include a shift in sexual orientation, but this does not need to be our expectation, or a measure of the efficacy, of counseling or the faithfulness of an individual.

Our society considers sexual orientation to be hard-wired and immutable, this seems to fly in the face of the testimonies of those who have experienced change in their own sexual orientation. It is possible, given recent findings about the plasticity of the brain, that a commitment to a changed sexual identity via a renewed mind, and the desire to sexually express oneself according to this transformed identity, may actually shift a person's orientation. But again, this is not what the Gospel requires for an individual, it may simply make life, and sexuality, in this world, and in the church, less complicated for those who experience such change.

It seems, from a longitudinal study of the efficacy of Christian counseling that it is significantly more likely that someone seeking a change in sexual identity through counseling will experience a change in sexual identity with no, or little, change in orientation, and that such an individual will, as a result, pursue a life of chastity.⁵⁴

The church must care for these individuals, as we must every individual who pursues a life of chastity, whether in marriage or in singleness, while recognise the difficulties that come from the dominant cultural narratives about sexuality and sexual expression being at the heart of humanity, such that not sexually expressing "who you are" or "who you were born to be" is considered harmful and inhuman.

We believe that by the power of the Holy Spirit, and as the process of being conformed into the image of Jesus takes place, all people, whether they experience a heterosexual orientation, a homosexual orientation, or a bi-sexual orientation, can change aspects of their sexuality in order to conform to the image of Jesus.

'Answers to your questions: For a better understanding of sexual orientation and homosexuality,' 2008, www.apa.org/topics/orientation.pdf

⁵⁴ S.L Jones, and M.A Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal Study*