

God & Sexuality

The Problem

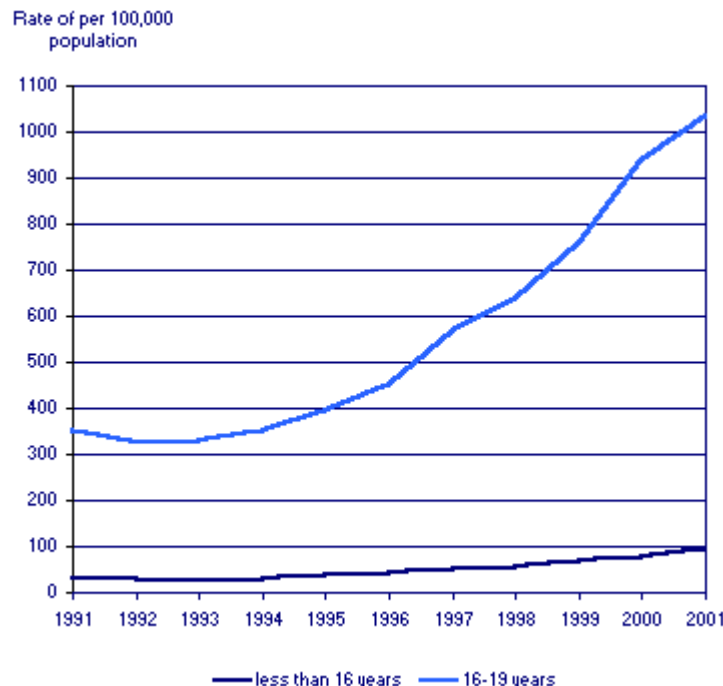
In 1960 the oral contraceptive pill became available. It remains the most reliable form of contraception, but most significantly it gave women freedom to control their own fertility and separated sex from reproduction once and for all. Few could have predicted the huge impact that this separation between the physical act of sex and its social consequences would have on the sexual behaviour of the Western world. I would suggest that UK society is facing a sexual crisis for at least five reasons.

1. Massive Increase in sexually transmitted diseases, especially among young people

Statistics for the diagnosis of sexually transmitted diseases in the UK show that in the past decade there have been massive increases:

Year	Syphilis, primary & secondary	Gonorrhoea (uncomplicated)	Chlamydia (uncomplicated)	Herpes (first attack)	Warts (first attack)	All diagnoses
2005	2,807	19,495	109,832	19,771	81,203	790,387
% change (1996-2005)	1,949%	55%	206%	18%	26%	59%

Although a small part of this increase in diagnosis is due to greater attendance of people at genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, there has undoubtedly been a general deterioration in sexual health, especially among young people and homosexuals. The most common sexually transmitted disease in the UK is now Chlamydia. It can have serious side-effects, one of which is Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) which can lead to infertility in women. However, because STDs can often be asymptomatic, many people do not come forward to be tested. The rates of chlamydia are higher among younger people than older age groups. For example, recent surveys of young women attending GP clinics have found a chlamydia prevalence of 8.1% among those under 20 years old, and 5.2% among those 20-24 years old. The rate of infection peaks in the 16-19 age group. Rates of infection with syphilis have increased most dramatically, and although the rates remain low compared to chlamydia, this is particularly worrying because of the long terms risks of syphilis and because it had been thought for years to be under control in the UK (when I was a medical student we were taught that the only cases of syphilis we could expect to see were tertiary effects in elderly people infected decades before). There are in excess of 1.5 million attendances at genitourinary medicine clinics in the UK each year, a number which has been growing by at least 15% annually. These statistics can be clearly illustrated using the graph below:



Rates of diagnoses of uncomplicated genital chlamydia infection in females made in GUM clinics by age group, United Kingdom

What has been the UK Government's response to this rising problem? In November 2004, UK Health Secretary John Reid announced proposals for a £300 million campaign to tackle the rapidly increasing rates of sexually transmitted diseases. He said:

Prevention messages are not getting through ... We need to act now on sexual health - and make it a priority.

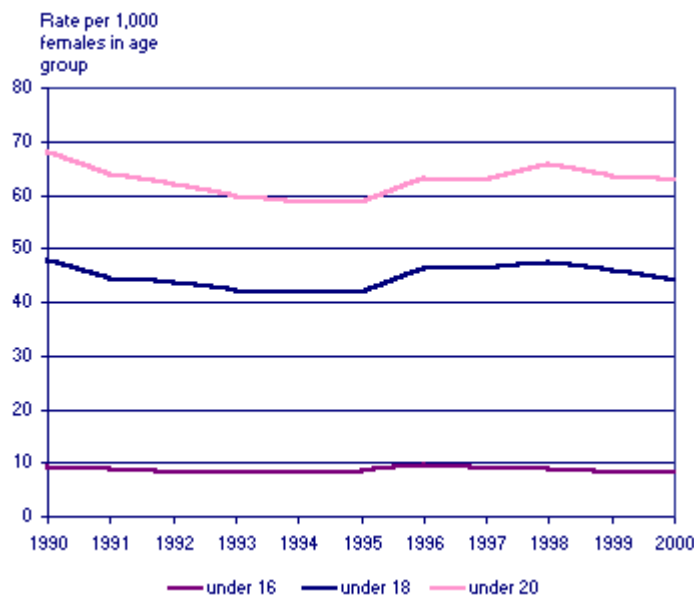
£130 million of the funding was meant to go towards the modernisation of GUM clinics, with £40m devoted to contraceptive and other preventative services. Another £50m was to be spent on a TV awareness campaign aimed at young people, supposed to be the largest campaign of its kind since the 1980s "Tombstone" adverts, although this amount was later slashed to £7.5 million. The basic message of these advertisements, as of all Government literature, is this:

Condoms are essential wear: Always use a condom every time you have sex, as this is the best way of making sure you don't get a STI [sexually transmitted infection]

Is this actually a true statement? Surely abstinence is the only 100% fool-proof way to avoid the risk of getting an STD or of becoming pregnant.

2. Teenage sexual activity and pregnancy

On 12th May 2006 the *Daily Mail* reported that a girl was about to become Britain's youngest mother at the age of 12 years 8 months after becoming pregnant at age 11. The girl smoked 20 cigarettes a day despite being eight months' pregnant. She conceived when she lost her virginity to a boy of 15 on a drunken night out with friends. The 15-year-old was charged with rape by police. Her 34-year-old mother, who gave birth to her youngest child eight months ago, said she was 'proud' of her daughter. Unfortunately this example is all too common. Although there have been modest decreases in teenage pregnancy rates since 2000, the graph below shows that rates over a longer period have barely changed, and that, in particular, rates in girls aged between 13 and 15 have not fallen at all.



Conception rates for female adolescents aged under 16, 18 and 20 years within/outside marriage, England and Wales

Even among Christian young people sexual activity prior to marriage is a real problem. In several of his books Josh McDowell includes the results of research about physical contact with people of the opposite sex among church youth in the USA in 1994. The results are shocking:

Activity	All	Age 11-12	Age 13-14	Age 15-16	Age 17-18
Held hands	89%	74%	84%	92%	95%
Embracing and some kissing	73%	39%	65%	80%	86%
Heavy "French" kissing	53%	15%	38%	61%	74%
Fondling of breasts	34%	4%	20%	41%	55%
Fondling of genitals	26%	2%	14%	30%	44%
Sexual intercourse	15%	1%	8%	18%	27%

Given that this research was conducted 12 years ago and in the socially and religiously more conservative USA, the rates of such activity in modern day UK are bound to be at least the same and probably higher. Our young people are facing a highly sexualised age and many are falling to temptation.

3. Marriage and fertility

The average age of marriage in the USA is 26 for women and almost 27 for men. In the UK it is 35 for men (compared to 29.2 in 1993) and 33 for women (compared to 27.2 in 1993) and married couples make up just over 50% of the adult population. Together with an increasing age of marriage there has been an increase in the average age of women at childbirth. According to the 2004 annual report of the *Office for National Statistics*, the mean age of women giving birth remained at 29.4 years, while the average age for women at first birth increased to 27.5 years. The percentage of births outside marriage has continued to rise. In 2004, 42.2 per cent of births were outside marriage, up from 41.4 in 2003.

Although in the UK birth rates have risen in recent years, largely thanks to an increasing rate among women born outside the UK (by 2004 these women accounted for 20% of births), there is generally a crisis across the European Union in birth rates. The EU average birth rate across the then 25 member states was 10.4 live births per 1000 inhabitants in 2004 compared to a world average of 20.1 (some developing countries have birth rates as high as 50 per 1000 inhabitants). The highest rate in Europe is in the Republic of Ireland (15.2), and the lowest of the 25 member states in 2004 was Germany (8.6). The combination of falling birth rates and rising death rates in Germany led the Federal government to introduce a state allowance to encourage people to have children. The birth rates are lowest in former East Germany, and the new Eastern European member states of the EU have lower rates even than Germany, with Cyprus, the Czech Republic and Slovakia at the bottom of the table. In 2003 the EU fertility rate fell to 1.48 children per woman, well below the 2.1 children per woman level needed to maintain the population. The overall result is that the EU population is predicted to fall from 469.5 million in 2025 to 468.7 million in 2030. By contrast, the population of the USA is set to increase by 25.6 percent between 2000 and 2025. Of the five largest member states, only Britain and France are set to grow in population in the coming years, while in some countries the population will start falling by 2015, with a drop of more than 10-15 percent by 2050. Ireland and Denmark are also nearing the fertility rate necessary to renew the population.

The European Commission blames the impending crisis on changes in society which are constraining family choices – late access to employment, job instability, expensive housing and lack of child-rearing incentives through family benefits, parental leave, childcare and equal pay. It adds that the changes have major implications for prosperity, living standards and relations between the generations. Between now and 2030, the EU will lose 20.8 million (6.8 percent) people of working age as the number of over-65s will rise by more than 50 percent and the number of people aged between 15-64 will decrease by nearly 7 percent. To offset the dramatic rate at which people will drop out the job market, the EU will need an average employment rate of more than 70 percent. Immigration is the only thing keeping the EU population growing for the time being.

Since communism collapsed, the Russian birth rate has more than halved. At the same time, the death rate is soaring – with Russian men living to an average of just 59 years -14 years less than a typical Western European man. In 2001, the head of the *World Health Organisation*, Dr Mikka Vienonen said that his country was facing a demographic crisis, unprecedented in a developed country in peace time. He was reported as saying:

Russia has been relatively generous with population, there has always been so much so that she didn't really need to bother if some people died, there were more to be born.

However, the lowest birth rate in the world is not Germany (which is second) or Russia, but Hong Kong, where the rate is 7.29. Both Japan and China are facing the problem that many young professionals do not want to marry or to have children. This is especially true for young women who have rejected traditional roles in society and prioritise career and leisure over family life. The fact is that many women who are postponing childbirth to focus on their careers means they are taking a serious risk of never having children. A woman's fertility rate starts declining in her late 20s. In the USA one third to one half of professional women are childless at age 40, and only a small percentage planned it that way. The number of women having children in their 30s and 40s has increased sharply over the last 20 years, at a time when the birth rate has dropped for younger women.

4. Wider acceptance of pornography

The Playboy brand is now one of the most popular ranges of stationery ever sold by WHSmith. And its products are aimed at children. The pressure group Object is campaigning against WHSmith's promotion of the Playboy brand to children. It says:

Playboy's logo clearly represents pornography... WHSmith is therefore endorsing pornography to young, impressionable and possibly underage girls."

In 2005, Mizz magazine, which is aimed at preteens and teens, promoted Playboy stationery on its cover and as a free giveaway inside. Editor Lucie Tobin defends her choice of giveaway:

The Playboy brand extensions are one of the most popular with our readers - to them it is a cool stationery and clothing brand. They love the colours and the logo which is given added cool by its association with American hip-hop stars. To them, it is a fashion range and they are unaware of its history. We reflect our readers' tastes, not tell them what they should like... Our readers are 10 to 14 and relatively unworldly. Under my editorship, we do not cover sex in Mizz and pride ourselves on being parent-friendly and responsible.

Mainstream and teen media have embraced so called "glamour girls" like Abi Titmuss, Jodie Marsh and Jordan. Little girls now see becoming a glamour girl as a viable career option.

This development parallels the increasing availability of pornography on the proliferation of sexually material on television and bill boards. Sadly, many Christians, including a significant percentage of pastors have been ensnared by pornography. Pornography is a serious problem for Christians for a number of reasons:

- a) **Those producing pornography are involved in sin** – sex outside monogamous marriage
- b) **Many women and young people are involved in pornography under coercion**
- c) **Pornography causes problems for the person viewing it:**
 - i. Guilt, fear and shame
 - ii. Addiction – this can lead to interference with other responsibilities
 - iii. Undesirable memories – visual images are hard to dislodge from the memory
 - iv. Unrealistic expectations of sex in marriage – because pornography is not real!
 - v. Disrespect towards women
 - vi. Loss of openness and trust in marriage – this can destroy a marriage over time

We will return to some practical advice as regards dealing with pornography later in this study.

5. Wider acceptance of homosexuality

The first civil partnerships for homosexuals in the UK took place in Belfast on 19th December 2006, granting couples similar rights to married couples. There is a growing acceptance of homosexuality in this country as in many other Western countries which is evident in every aspect of the media. This did not happen by accident, but has been the result of a concerted campaign by homosexual groups. In fact, this is probably the most successful campaign in history by any minority group. It has been possible because of the high number of homosexuals in the arts and media, with one study of the biographies of 1004 eminent people showing that homosexual and bisexual people represented 11% of the sample, especially among poets (24%), fiction writers (21%), and artists and musicians (15%). This compares with a rate in the general population of only somewhere between 1-4%. The strategy of the lobbyists has been well documented in a number of books published by campaigners. It follows four stages:

- i. Divert attention from what homosexuals do
- ii. Make homosexuality a topic of everyday discussion
- iii. Portray homosexuals as "normal" in every other way
- iv. Depict those who disapprove of homosexual behaviour as motivated by fear, ignorance and greed

It is obvious how this strategy has progressed through the popular media, with inclusion of homosexual characters in comedies and soap operas progressing to having a series focusing on homosexual characters (*Will and Grace*). Now it has become extremely difficult to speak out against homosexuality as this leads to an immediate accusation of homophobia. Unfortunately Christians have too often invited these accusations through their response to the issue. We will consider how Christians should respond later in this study.

Sex Education

A review of all the available evidence on sex education by the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination concluded that good, comprehensive sex and relationships education which starts before the onset of sexual activity does not make young people more likely to have sex. In fact it helps them

to delay starting sex and makes them more likely to use contraception when they do. This was reaffirmed by the Health Development Agency's review of the evidence of interventions to prevent teenage pregnancy. As Christians we should not be afraid of good sex education in schools. However, there are three major problems from a Christian perspective:

a) The main responsibility in sex education rests with parents

Our modern society places great emphasis on professional education in matters of sex and sexuality, but this can never replace the importance of good sex education in the home. Although this is not easy, it is vital that Christian parents take the lead in educating their children about these matters. Since sex education in schools begins earlier and earlier, it is vital that Christian parents are aware of what their children are learning and discuss this with them from a Christian perspective.

b) Sex education is never "value-free"

Diana Baumrind (1982), a University of California child-rearing expert, has observed that adolescents interpret sex education that pretends to be "value-free" to mean that adults are neutral about teenage sexual activity. She adds that this is unfortunate, because "promiscuous recreational sex poses certain psychological, social, health, and moral problems that must be faced realistically." The fact is that sex education is never "value free". If there is no moral framework underpinning it then children will conclude that there are no moral restraints concerning sexual matters. The only reasons to postpone having sex become practical rather than principled. Unfortunately, in our current society sex education will not encompass Christian morality. The Government's focus is on reducing teenage pregnancy and rates of STDs rather than promoting family values. Of course, many groups are campaigning for values to be introduced in sex education, but the values they espouse are far from Christian. As I was writing this study I received a phone call from a Christian teacher to inform me about a current campaign to introduce a rule that teachers must include homosexuality as a normal practice in all teaching of sex education.

c) Abstinence should be included as a sensible option

In the USA abstinence pledges have gained popularity as an alternative form of sex education. Over 2.5 million young people have taken a vow to abstain from sex until marriage, and this approach has received \$270 million in funding from the Bush administration. Teenage pregnancy rates in the USA have been falling since 1991, though they are still much higher than in the UK. Proponents of abstinence education claim that this is a direct result of their approach. Research by the Alan Guttmacher Institute suggests 25% of the decline was indeed due to more teenagers remaining abstinent, but the remaining 75% was due to improved contraceptive use amongst sexually active teenagers. It is debatable whether abstinence teaching makes any difference to sexual activity among teenagers who have no religious conviction, but it has been clearly demonstrated to increase the age at which young people first have sex by an average of 18 months. The simple fact is that the only way to be 100% sure of avoiding pregnancy and STDs is not to have sex. This is indisputable, and yet opponents of abstinence try to play this down on the basis that young people simply will not be able to keep abstinence pledges in the face of the pressures of discovering their sexual passions and in the face of peer pressure. It is amazing that so few of these people realise that we need to make changes to society to reduce the number of positive messages about sexuality that young people receive from the media. In the UK there is a firm resistance to abstinence from many groups which can only be explained by a hostility to Christian morality. This is despite the fact that Uganda, unlike other African countries has been able to create a dramatic decline in the spread of HIV over the past decade or so by producing a three-way shift in sexual behaviour: abstinence, condom use and monogamy.

Homosexuality

Sexual orientation

Throughout human history some human beings have engaged in homosexual activities. In recent years this has been explained in terms of "sexual orientation", which is the belief that we express the direction of our sexual interest through an enduring sexual attraction toward members of a particular gender. There is no record of any culture that has not been predominantly heterosexual, and so homosexuality has generally been regarded as abnormal or at least a minority tendency throughout history. Our modern society is remarkable in terms of the degree of prominence of homosexuality and its widespread acceptance. It is vital that Christians can respond to this trend in society in a

distinctively Christian way. Before commenting on the Christian response we must first consider the facts about homosexuality.

Rates of homosexuality

Until recently, the popular press assumed that 10% of the population were homosexual. This figure was based on the Kinsey reports (published in 1948 and 1953), but they failed to take account of the fact that Kinsey's research was not based on random samples from the population, and that he interviewed male prisoners in disproportionate numbers. More than a dozen anonymous national surveys conducted in both the USA and Europe in the early 1990s agreed in suggesting that a more accurate figure is about 3 or 4% of men and 1 to 2% of women. Less than 1% of the respondents reported being actively bisexual, but a larger number of adults reported having had an isolated homosexual experience. And most people said they had had an occasional homosexual fantasy. The current theory is that people fall along a range of sexual orientations from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. In other words, most people are capable of either homosexual or heterosexual attraction.

Homosexual relationships

Same-sex relations have been and continue to be organised in distinctly categorical ways by different societies in different eras:

- **Egalitarian** – two partners with no relevance to age and both playing the same socially-accepted sex role as heterosexuals of their own sex. This is exemplified by relationships currently prevalent in western society between partners of similar age and gender.
- **Gender structured** – each partner plays a different gender role. This is exemplified by traditional relations between men in the Mediterranean Basin, the Middle East and Central and South Asia.
- **Age structured** – partners of different ages, usually one adolescent and the other adult. This is exemplified by pederasty among the Classical Greeks or those engaged in by novice samurai with more experienced warriors, southern Chinese boy-marriage rites and ongoing Central Asian and Middle Eastern practices.

Usually in any society one form of homosexuality predominates, though others are likely to co-exist. As a byproduct of growing Western cultural dominance, this egalitarian homosexuality is spreading from western culture to non-Western societies, although there are still defined differences between the various cultures. The fact is, however, that few homosexuals are within long-term relationships with only one sexual partner. Less than 10% of homosexuals report having ever been in a relationship of more than ten years duration, and 75% of homosexuals report having had more than 100 partners in a lifetime over 50% of whom were strangers. Promiscuity is the norm for the vast majority of homosexuals. Of course, there are some homosexuals who do stay in committed relationships.

What causes homosexuality?

Homosexual groups describe sexual orientation as being similar to handedness. As one article by a homosexual group said:

Most psychologists today view sexual orientation as neither wilfully chosen nor wilfully changed. Sexual orientation in some ways is like handedness: Most people are one way, some the other. A very few are truly ambidextrous. Regardless, the way one is endures. Nor is sexual orientation linked with psychological disorder or sexual crime. "Child molester" is not a sexual orientation. Some homosexuals do abuse children, but most child molesters are heterosexual males.

By 1967 the campaign for acceptance of homosexuality had reached the point where consenting homosexual sex between men over the age of 18 years was legalised in the UK, and by 1973 the American Psychiatry Association removed homosexuality from their list of diagnostic categories in mental illness. The general perception among the public today is that homosexuals are "born that way" rather than choosing to be that way. In this section I will briefly review the current scientific theories and evidence about the causes of homosexuality:

- **Genetics:** There was great media hype a few years ago about the supposed discovery of a "gay gene". However, studies of twin brothers of homosexual men reveal that 52% of identical twins (who have identical genes) were also homosexual, as were 22% of fraternal twin brothers (who are not genetically identical). This shows that although genetics may play a part in determining sexuality, there cannot be one single gene that results in it.
- **Pre-natal hormone exposure:** Exposure to the hormone levels typically experienced by female foetuses during this time may predispose the person (whether female or male) to be attracted to males in later life.

- **Older male siblings:** Each older brother increases the rate of homosexuality by 33%. This effect may be due to an immune response by the mother to antigens male foetus resulting in impairment of masculinisation in later male fetuses.
- **Physiological differences in homosexuals:** Several recent studies demonstrate that there are notable physical differences between heterosexual men and homosexual men. These differences are primarily in the brain, inner ear and olfactory sense. One scientist discovered that approximately 10% of homosexual male brains were physiologically different from their heterosexual counterparts. However, his research did not take into account that these men died of AIDS (which decreases testosterone levels in men and may have caused the brain differences he saw) and that it is also impossible to say if these differences are the cause or a result of homosexuality.
- **Distant fathers:** Numerous studies have found that adult homosexual males tend to report having had less loving and more rejecting fathers than their heterosexual peers. However, these reports have been criticised, particularly because they cannot say if this difference is a cause or effect of homosexuality and also because they don't explain relatively constant rates of homosexuality across cultures irrespective of traditional roles of father.
- **Dominant or overly protective mothers** – this is also disputed
- **Trauma arresting sexual development:** Freud believed that all human teenagers are predominantly homosexual and transition to heterosexuality in adulthood. Those who remain homosexual as adults had experienced some traumatic event that arrested their sexual development.
- **Gender non-conforming behaviour in childhood** – again it is difficult to say if this is a cause or effect.

What are the risks of homosexuality?

Homosexual acts are harmful to health in every sense:

- a) **Physical** – homosexual intercourse between men carries risks of damage to the body that are not the same as natural homosexual intercourse. This damage also increases the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV / AIDS.
- b) **Mental** – homosexuals have three times the rate of alcohol abuse and suicide attempts and twelve times the rate of major depression when compared with heterosexual adults. Although homosexual groups claim that this is entirely because of the additional social pressures homosexuals face, the increase in rates of mental health problems is actually greater in societies where homosexuality is most accepted. This suggests that homosexual activity itself either causes or tends to be found alongside other mental disorders.
- c) **Spiritual** – from the Christian perspective, homosexual activity has spiritual consequences.

Tendencies and actions are not the same

As can be seen, there remains little conclusive evidence regarding factors that result in homosexual tendencies. However, it is clear that there is no single cause, and that a number of factors always interact in any one case. It is important, however, to say that the question of what makes some people predisposed to homosexual attraction is not the same as asking whether it is morally acceptable. The two are only the same if the issue is approached from a naturalistic worldview in which all of our actions are determined by our physical and social make up and there is no objective standard of morality. From the fact that most people are capable of either heterosexual or homosexual actions it is clear that there is a large degree of personal choice about how people express their sexuality. From a Christian point of view, just because people have a desire to do something does not mean that it is morally acceptable or that they are incapable of resisting that desire. We must look at what God's word says about homosexuality.

The Biblical Record

There are several key Bible passages mentioning homosexuality. Perhaps the most famous of these is the reference to homosexuality in Sodom in Genesis 19 where the men of Sodom wanted to rape the two male visitors who had come to Lot's house. In fact, this example has led to homosexuality being described as sodomy. This interpretation is mistaken. Sodom was an extremely sinful city (see Genesis 13:13), but homosexuality was not their only sin and it was not solely because there were homosexuals in the city that God decided to judge it but because the extent to which sin typified the society as a whole was so great (Genesis 18:20). The horrific example of homosexual gang rape was simply an indicator of how steeped in sin the city was. Ezekiel 16:49-50 clearly shows that the judgement of Sodom had at least as much to do with their oppression of the poor and their pride as with the "detestable things" they did. The "sin of Sodom" was rejection of God, not homosexuality

per se. There is a similar example in Judges 19 with the addition in that case that a woman was given in the place of the man the men of Gibeah wanted to rape and she died as a result of her injuries. In that case the village was also judged, although through civil war rather than fire from the heavens. Barring these examples there are a number of passages we must consider:

- **Leviticus 18:22; 20:13** – these verses clearly state that homosexual acts are sinful and detestable to God, and that any such act should be a capital offence in Israel. Attempts to limit these prohibitions to temple prostitution as some have done are simply not warranted from the text.
- **I Corinthians 6:9-11** – Paul lists homosexuality together with other vices as a sin that will exclude people from the Kingdom of God.
- **Romans 1:24-27** – this passage is highly significant as it shows us that homosexuality, although not being worse than any other sin, is what I call a “marker sin”. In other words, the widespread acceptance of homosexuality is a sign that a society or culture has reached a very low point. This whole section of Romans from 1:18 describes the slide of human society from initially ignoring God (vv18-21), to then replacing Him with other objects of worship (vv22&23, 25), to widespread sinful actions (vv24, 26-31), to actually legislating in favour of those who practice such things (v32). The passage shows that sexual desires are only one of the desires that human beings have and that when human beings reject God and His righteous laws God allows us to follow these desires to sinful ends. From a Christian perspective this explains the widespread acceptance of homosexual behaviour in today’s society.

The only way to see homosexuality as Biblically acceptable is either to move away from a high view of Scripture as the authoritative, inspired word of God or to grossly misinterpret the above passages.

Can sexual orientation change?

According to Wikipedia:

there is no credible, scientific evidence supporting successful ‘treatment’ of homosexual orientation, and some persons have reported that great harm was inflicted on them by such ‘treatments’”. Most mainstream medical and psychological organisations consider attempts to change sexual orientation to be ineffective and potentially harmful.

However, there are some studies suggesting that this is not entirely true, and that effective change in sexual orientation can be achieved with behavioural therapy. This is an area where more research is needed, but it will be difficult to have unbiased research given the strength of feeling over the issue. It is important to say that even those people who have lifelong homosexual tendencies can play an active role in the church and in God’s purposes. The option of celibacy is open to them (see below).

A Christian response to homosexuality

Sadly, Christians have failed to respond in an appropriate way to the issue of homosexuality. It has been true in too many cases that the response has been driven by fear and ignorance and there has been hypocrisy in singling homosexuality out above other sins that the Christian community may also be guilty of (for example the oppression of the poor that Ezekiel 16 spoke of). A truly Christian response will hold in balance the two great qualities of God’s character: grace and truth. It will hold unswervingly to Biblical truth and yet will be full of compassion. There are several important aspects to a helpful Christian response:

1. **We must not compromise our moral position** about the sinfulness of homosexual acts. We do need to campaign peacefully and graciously but firmly about the moral issue, and to resist further changes towards acceptance of homosexuality (especially its inclusion in sex education).
2. **We must embrace those who struggle** with homosexual temptation (orientation) and offer them affirmation in God’s loving community. It is important to emphasise that this temptation is no different from other temptations and that those who do not struggle at all with it are not superior to those who do.
3. **We must uphold chastity as an alternative** to sexual activity for those who cannot find fulfilment in heterosexual relationships (see notes on I Corinthians 7:1 for the Biblical basis for chastity). Homosexual tendencies are not sin, just as no temptation is sin, but acting on these tendencies is sinful.
4. **We must overcome evil with good** – this will include actively seeking ways to show compassion to active homosexuals, even those who are unrepentant and most hostile to the Christian position, and to engage with them in a measured way. One very good way to do so is to be actively involved in caring for AIDS patients.
5. **We must assure those who have repented** of past involvement in homosexual activity of God’s forgiveness on the basis of Christ’s death for them and of God’s power to overcome

temptation in future. In I Corinthians 6:9-11 after listing a range of sins including homosexuality, Paul reminds the believers that some of them came from this background, but that they had now been justified, washed and sanctified in the name of Christ and by the Holy Spirit. Restoration is possible through Christ, and the Holy Spirit can empower us to change.

A Scriptural view of sexuality

There are many passages of Scripture that teach us about God's view of human sexuality, but for the purposes of this study we will focus on just one passage: **I Corinthians 6:12-7:9**. The church in Corinth was troubled by many issues, but one of the most significant was serious sexual immorality among its members (see I Corinthians 5 where Paul makes it clear that serious sexual sin in the absence of repentance must lead to a breaking of fellowship with the guilty brother or sister). In the passage under consideration some key biblical principles about sexuality emerge:

- **Sexual desire is a natural appetite of the body (6:12&13)**

God is not opposed to human sexuality. In fact, sexual desire is a normal appetite of the human body just as our appetite for food is. This is the comparison Paul makes in 6:13 when he speaks of food and the stomach. The idea that sex is somehow unclean or wrong in itself, which has been seen in some strands of Christian thinking in the Western world, is not based on the Bible. This thinking, which led to the requirement for celibacy among priests, nuns and monks in the Roman Catholic system, came into Christian thinking from the Greek dualistic philosophy that we have examined in previous studies in this series. The Roman Catholic view that contraception is wrong simply because it interferes with what they see as the only aim of sex (procreation) is also deficient. Scripture never sees sexual activity as merely for the purpose of producing children. Instead there are three purposes for sex in God's order of creation:

1. **Procreation** – so that children can be conceived and born.
2. **Recreation** – for the mutual enjoyment of both partners (this is a valid and natural expression of the desire).
3. **Creation** – the sexual act expresses physically and strengthens the bond between husband and wife. It is the physical expression of the reality that the two are now one flesh.

- **All appetites of the body must be controlled and used appropriately (6:15-20)**

Sex is a good gift from God, and as with every gift He has given us we must exercise good stewardship in how we use it. This is the thrust of Paul's argument in 6:19-20 where he reminds us that our bodies belong to God since we were bought at a price, and so we are accountable to God in how we use our bodies. The body is not intended as a way for us to gratify our desires or to indulge ourselves. Every natural desire we have can be used in a way that honours God or in ways that do not. Eating is good, but over-eating is bad. Sex is good, but sexual immorality in all its forms is bad. Because the sexual act expresses physically the spiritual reality of the bond between husband and wife, in spiritual terms a man is married to whatever person he has sex with. Even the most casual and meaningless of sexual encounters, that between a man and a prostitute has a deep spiritual significance (6:15&16). We must understand this principle and apply it. This is the reason why premarital sex is so harmful. The young couple are expressing with their bodies something that they are not ready to express with the soul or mouth – the loving surrender of one to the other. It is no wonder that there are so many emotional problems for young people who engage in pre-marital sex.

- **The only appropriate avenue for physical expression of sexuality is in heterosexual, monogamous marriage (7:2&3)**

In 7:2&3 Paul makes this absolutely clear. Although there are many examples in the Old Testament of polygamy (David and Jacob spring to mind) the New Testament is absolutely clear that the Christian position is to have only one wife or husband. As we have seen before, homosexuality is not part of God's plan for mankind, and the Scripture is also consistent in maintaining that sex outside the marriage relationship is sinful (it is, in fact, a contradiction) and that adultery is wrong (see Exodus 20:14). It should also be clear from the nature of marriage as described here that a Christian must marry a Christian – otherwise we would be uniting Christ with another who is not part of Christ.

- **Celibacy is a commendable state for some people who are called to it (7:1, 8)**

The New Testament upholds celibacy as a valid station of life for those who are called to it by God (7:1,8). Those who remain single throughout life should never be made to feel inferior or

abnormal. In fact, there are some situations in which it is advisable for young people to remain single, such as when the church is under severe persecution (see 7:25-35). Some people may be called to celibacy so that their lives can be focused on Christian ministry. The bottom line is that, contrary to the message of 21st Century society, a person does not need to be sexually active to be a normal, fulfilled human being!

- **Lust is sinful (7:9)**

As we have already said, temptation is not sin. It is important to say this in the context of temptation to heterosexual sin. To see another person and to admire their beauty or to recognise that they are sexually attractive is not sin. However, Paul speaks about “burning with passion” (7:9), which is clearly harmful, and Christ taught that to look at a woman who is not ones wife with lust is equally sinful as committing adultery with her (Matthew 5:27). It is important that we understand what lust is. Lust means to dwell on the initial sexual attraction and to begin to fantasise about acting on it. To do this is wrong. This is part of the problem with use of pornography, and is the real problem with masturbation, which often tends to be connected with lustful thoughts or fantasies. We need God’s power to exercise self-control over our thought life. It is vital that we seek to be under the control of the Holy Spirit if we are to have this kind of self-control (Galatians 5:22).

Contraception and the Christian

Another area of debate among Christians is over the issue of contraception. The Bible does not speak directly about this issue, and there are two main views among Christians who have a high view of Scripture:

- a) **Contraception is wrong as it interferes with the procreational purpose of sex**

This is the classical Roman Catholic position, but is also shared by some evangelicals. One problem with this view is that it tends to see sex in one dimension only, that is the purpose of procreation. As we have already seen, this is only one of three purposes for sex.

- b) **Contraception is acceptable as a means for a married couple to exercise good stewardship of their sexuality**

This view is widely accepted among many evangelicals who take the view that married couples must be responsible in their sexual activity, particularly in terms of procreation. They would see it as irresponsible for a couple to bring children into the world when they are unable to provide for their material needs and especially if the world population is growing at too fast a rate. So long as contraception is used within marriage it is not violating God’s Lordship, and a Christian couple can use it responsibly, seeking God’s guidance about whether or not they should have more children.

I would tend towards the second of these views, although I respect my brothers and sisters who take the alternative view.

A word on sexual abuse and paedophilia

There is great awareness of sexual abuse of children and the disturbing phenomenon of paedophilia in our modern society. One worrying factor is that some people are prepared to see paedophilia (sexual attraction towards children) as a valid sexual orientation on the same basis that homosexuality is justified. In fact, if homosexuality is accepted despite its unnatural nature it becomes difficult to explain why paedophilia, which is equally unnatural, is wrong. The only difference that remains is the fact that children do not consent to the acts they are involved in. I do not wish to discuss the issues of sexual abuse or paedophilia in depth here, but I feel that it is important to mention them since there may be some who read this study who have been the victims or the perpetrators of child abuse.

If you have been the victim I would urge you to talk to someone respected about this. You should speak to a Christian of the same sex as you and should consider reporting it to the relevant authorities (police or social services). This is important not only for your own sake (to see justice done) but for the sake of others (to prevent the abuser doing it again to others). Most importantly, you must not see yourself as being in any way guilty in the matter. Child abuse is sinful and unjustifiable, and it was not your fault. I pray that you can discover God’s healing in your life as you grasp His grace towards you. If you have been the perpetrator, then you must confess this sin to someone and to the authorities. You must not go to the person you abused to do this, but you owe it to them to see them finding help from those who can help them. You must seek God’s mercy.

Christian stewardship of sexuality

In addition to the suggestions above about a Christian response to homosexuality, it is also important for Christians to think about how they exercise stewardship of their sexuality within a heterosexual framework. The following are just a few practical suggestions:

1. Seek forgiveness for past sexual sin

In I Corinthians 5 when Paul had to tell the Corinthian Christians to expel from their fellowship an unrepentant man who was guilty of having sexual relations with his father's wife (v1), the aim is not to humiliate this man or to abandon him, but to see him coming to repentance. The aim (vv4&5) is to see him saved on the day of the Lord. There is forgiveness for sexual sin in Christ. Even if you have fallen you can be restored, and God can still use you for His purpose. If you have been guilty of premarital sex or lustful thoughts then you must repent and seek God's leadership for your future. If you have committed adultery there is the added dimension of your relationship to your spouse to consider. You must seek forgiveness not only from the Lord but from your spouse. There is the hope of restoration with God, but only if our repentance is genuine.

2. Avoid situations of potential temptation

As fallen human beings we are all at risk of sexual temptation. We must heed Paul's warning concerning temptation in I Corinthians 10:12:

if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Too many Christian men have thought themselves above sexual temptation only to fall into adultery. Too many Christian teenagers have believed they could resist the temptation to be sexually active with their boyfriend or girlfriend only to find themselves committing sexual acts before marriage that they live to regret. If you are married you must ensure that you remain faithful to your spouse. To ensure this I would advise never meeting alone in private with a person of the opposite sex who is not related to you. This is particularly important for those in Christian ministry who may be expected to offer pastoral care to people of the opposite sex. I make it a rule in ministry that I do not meet women alone except in a public place, and only then if it is impossible to have a female worker with me (preferably my wife). For unmarried people I strongly urge that you set limits to protect your virginity. Rates of sexual activity among Christian young people are shockingly high. This is largely because we live in a "sex-mad" society and because we do not have many of the restraints that previous generations had. I would recommend the following:

- (i) **Do not flirt** – flirting is really harmful for others. It can lead to all sorts of confusion and hurt and can even lead some people to stumble by causing them to have lustful thoughts. Keep your interactions with the opposite sex appropriate and remember that even if you have no feelings for the other person they might have them for you, no matter how unlikely that might seem to you. I would advise that your closest friendships should be with people of the same sex rather than those of the opposite sex.
- (ii) **Delay dating** – studies have shown that people who start dating early are more likely to engage in premarital sex. It is wise to delay dating until you are ready to begin to think about marriage, as marriage (not pleasure) should be the aim of Christian dating. I would recommend that you consider making a vow not to date before the age of 18, or at least 16. This will give you plenty of time to develop appropriate friendships with people of both sexes and to understand your own body and the nature of relationships before entering into one yourself.
- (iii) **Avoid being alone** – never be alone in a closed room or building with your boyfriend or girlfriend. This is for two reasons: so that you can avoid temptation and so that you can maintain your Christian witness. Even if you do not do anything behind those closed doors, others may think that you have. This can ruin your Christian witness to non-believers and may cause some weaker Christians to follow your example and so stumble. It may be inconvenient at times to keep to this standard, but it is wise and God will honour it. For this reason I would advise strongly against sharing a house with your boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage or sharing accommodation on holidays.
- (iv) **Set limits on physical contact** – agree firm limits on physical contact and keep to it. I recommend that holding hands, simple hugging (not cuddling) and possibly a simple kiss on the cheek or (and this is debatable) on the lips is a reasonable limit. You should discuss this and promise to one another that you will keep to this limit – that way when one of you is tempted the other one can say "stop" and you will listen. More intimate forms of contact including "French kissing" and touching in intimate places are asking for trouble. I would

also advice that you never lie down beside each other as this can too easily lead on to more intimate contact. Sometimes people think that it doesn't matter if they engage in more intimate contact as they intend marrying the person. This is misguided, as until you actually marry the person you cannot be sure that you will marry them. Keeping more intimate contact until marriage will be rewarding. Research shows that those people who remain virgins in the strict sense (no contact with the genital region of another person of any form) are more likely to have successful marriages that last and that are happy.

- (v) **Seek accountability** – ideally you should have older Christians to be accountable to. This could be your parents or a youth leader or pastor. You should ask these people to give you advice about what is and isn't appropriate and give them the authority to ask you if you have stepped over your limits.

3. Have nothing to do with pornography

We have already mentioned some of the harmful effects of pornography on the individuals involved in making it and also those who "consume" it. Pornography has never been more prevalent or more acceptable in society, but for the Christian it should be avoided in every form. We must "avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22), and pornography is certainly a form of evil! The test of our thought lives should be as Philippians 4:8 – true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. Pornography falls down on every one of these tests, and should have no place in our thoughts. It makes others into objects rather than treating them as people worthy of respect. How can we deal with the problem of pornography? I have three tips:

a. **ACCESS: Do not allow yourself or your children easy access to pornography**

We must take measures to make it difficult for ourselves to see pornography. This will include avoiding having televisions or computers with internet access in our bedrooms or any other place in the house that is out of public view. This is especially important for children. It may also mean installing software to limit what we can view or activating parental controls. Josh McDowell quotes a study of 600 male and female 11-14 year olds in the USA. 91% of males and 82% of females had already been exposed to hard core pornography. Although it may be nearly impossible to protect our children from this highly harmful influence, we must do everything we can to reduce the likelihood of it happening or of it becoming a habit. If you are a teenager and you have a computer or television in your bedroom I would encourage you to make the decision to move it out to a public area.

b. **ACCOUNTABILITY: Make yourself accountable to others**

It is very wise if you know you are tempted in this area to make yourself accountable either to an individual who can ask you about this issue or to a group who are committed to helping one another avoid this temptation. Another possible way to achieve this as regards internet pornography is to use software like *Covenant Eyes*, which alerts two designated accountability partners when you view inappropriate material, although unfortunately there is a cost for this service. You can find out more at www.covenanteyes.com.

c. **ACTION: Replace temptation with positive action**

Temptation is never resisted by simply trying to fight it. The problem with doing this is that we end up focussing on the temptation and thus become more likely to become obsessed with it. The cycle of temptation, struggle, defeat, sin, guilt, temptation etc. will be familiar to most of us in some area of life. To break this cycle we must replace the struggle with positive action. We must ask God for the power He promised to help us overcome temptation or for the way out to escape it (1 Corinthians 12:13). If you are tempted to view pornography I suggest switching off the computer or television and going out for a walk, picking up your Bible to read or phoning a friend for a chat as good ways to replace this temptation.

Not by might nor by power

Zechariah 4:6 contains the Lord's words to Zerubbabel to encourage him to keep building the Temple in Jerusalem. Faced with such a great task Zerubbabel may well have grown faint of heart and felt powerless to complete it. God's answer was clear:

'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.

We are faced with a great task when we consider how to control our sexual passions. The answer is the same for us as for Zerubbabel. If we try in our own strength we will be doomed to failure, but by the power of the Spirit we can have victory. May He fill us and transform us, and may he fill us with such a passion for the Lord's glory that all other passions become secondary. May we learn to glorify the Lord through faithful stewardship of our sexuality.