



A Biblical Approach to Human Sexuality:

*A Response by a UALC Study Group to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Study,
"The Church and Human Sexuality: A Lutheran Perspective"*

(Prepared in 1994)

■ Introduction

We, the members of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church (UALC), are writing this paper in response to the ELCA Study on "The Church and Human Sexuality: A Lutheran Perspective."¹ After careful study, prayer and discussion, we found some of the conclusions reached and the key methods used in the ELCA paper to be substantially at variance with historic Christianity. Rather than trying to answer all the points of the ELCA paper, it was decided to write our own paper to state our understanding and beliefs, based on the Scriptures.

More specifically, our purpose is:

- to hear what God, through His written Word, has to say about human sexuality,
- to understand God's best for us as sexual beings,
- to show that all of us will be brought to repentance before God as we seek the best He has for us, and,
- to relate to each other in the light of God's loving grace that frees each of us from sin.

Isa 61:1-2 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,...

If the Church will not stand apart for the Lord our God with regard to human sexuality, it will become impotent and will have lost its ability to be God's voice to a world floundering in sin.

Psa 32:3-7 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. *Selah* Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah* Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah*

1 John 4:4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

God is, always has been and always will be the sovereign ruler of His creation. If we, as the Church, will be faithful to His calling and His Word; if we will pray fervently for healing; and if we will stand firmly against sin, God will deliver us!

■ Authority of Scripture

Biblical/Historical View

Traditionally, the Lutheran Church has based its faith and life on the Scriptures and on confessions of faith, such as The Augsburg Confession ("The Book of Concord"²), believing that the Bible is true and valid for directing and guiding our lives. At UALC we continue to live by this principle and to embrace the eternal authority of God's Word.

2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Isa 40:8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

ELCA Statement on Scripture: The canonical Scriptures of the Old, and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world. This congregation accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

As Christians, we believe it is vitally important to maintain a balanced view of Scripture, freely allowing God to speak to us through both the Old and New Testaments - law and grace. Only together are they the complete, revealed Word of God. Without the law to show us God's standard, and our failure, humankind has no need for the good news of forgiveness and reconciliation found throughout the Scriptures. Jesus Himself said:

Mat 5:17-18 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

Contemporary View

Human beings, however, constantly want to change God's Word to fit their own ideas and needs to accommodate what they want. In effect, we say to God, “Our thoughts are not your thoughts, our thoughts are higher than your thoughts because the latest studies show...” Many people are all too willing to accept the latest study or psychology that “fits” the times rather than God's eternal Word. This exaggeration of our importance is nothing new.

Mark 7:7-8 “They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

2Tim 4:3-4 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Rom 1:25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised. Amen.

In a like manner, some people have the idea that biblical writers would have changed their message based on current positions or studies. This belief denies God's power. Does He not know everything before it happens? Certainly! He is perfectly able to direct those through whom He proclaims His Word to write eternal truths which apply to all ages (2 Tim 3:16-17, Isa 40:8).

Another modern day tendency is to first decide what one wants to believe and then attempt to make Scripture support such a position. The admonition of Scripture, as stated in Proverbs, is a powerful reminder of the consequences of turning the process around.

Prov 30:5-6 Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.

Christian View

A major promise of Christian life is that all people must allow God to form them into His image in order for them to glorify Him. Scripture tells us that we need to conform to His image rather than attempting to conform Him to ours, which is idolatry.

Isa 29:16 You turn things upside down as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it “He did not make me”? Can

the pot say of the potter, “He knows nothing”?

Isa 64:8 Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Rom 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Christians further believe and understand that all sin is equal in God's eyes, and we know that all of us are sinners and deserve to be judged guilty by God's righteous standards.

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Mark 7:20-23 He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”

Just as Jesus made no distinction between the various, sinful acts listed above, we find no basis in Scripture for minimizing or exempting anything God has called sin.

■ Human Sexuality

God's Plan

Sexuality is God's idea. Used according to God's plan, sexuality is a wonderful gift. At the time of creation, God established the difference between the sexes as well as the intended relationship between a man and a woman.

Gen 1:27-28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Gen 2:18-24 The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken

out of the man and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Jesus repeated this truth.

Mark 10:6-9 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Worth noting is that Jesus did not, at this or any other time, expand on this statement to sanction any sexual relationship apart from a marriage between one man and one woman.

The love and care found in a godly marriage is an analogy for the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Eph 5:28-32 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it just as Christ does the church for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Just as God calls for mutual love and honor between a husband and wife, so He calls for each of us to use our own body according to His plan. What we do with our body also has an effect upon our spirit. There is a powerful bond between body and spirit that can be profoundly affected by our sexual morality.

1 Cor 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

Boundaries of Sexual Relations

When individuals use God's gift in ways other than as intended, they open themselves to the enemy. Satan cannot create; he can only pervert or distort the good gifts that God alone creates. Any man/woman sexual relationship outside of marriage defiles the pure gift God has given and must be judged as sin.

Heb 13:4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Exo 20:14 You shall not commit adultery.

Mat 5:31-32 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

A publicly declared, legally binding marriage between one man and one woman remains the one appropriate relationship for sexual expression. Heterosexual marriage, faithfulness within marriage, abstinence outside of marriage - these constitute the Christian standard. When we fall short, we are invited to repent, receive the forgiveness of God, and amend our lives³ with the help of The Holy Spirit. (See Church/Christian Position at the end of this document.)

Any same sex relationship is also clearly condemned.

Lev 18:22 Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

Lev 20:13 If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Rom 1:24-27 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

These verses are clear in their content utilizing terms that are strong and unmistakable in their meaning. Nowhere in the Bible is homosexual activity regarded as anything other than sin.

Neither does the Bible excuse a prohibited relationship based on the quality of the relationship. When considering sexual relationships, and thinking biblically, the first question is not "Is this a loving, committed relationship?" The first question is: "is this a permitted relationship?"⁴ Whether a person is born with an inclination toward a particular sin (such as homosexual eroticism, or drunkenness, or compulsive anger), or acquires it during life, is irrelevant. Sin is sin.⁵ As Lutherans, we understand that everyone is subject to sinful inclinations that have not been freely chosen. Sin is a condition into which each individual is born. The specific sins Paul mentions (covetousness, malice, envy, etc. [Rom 1:29]) manifest inclinations we have not chosen, but whose effects God calls us to control. Love and commitment do not change a previously unacceptable form of sexual relationship into an acceptable one.⁶

Abuses by Humanity

In addition to the problem of improper relationships, sexuality has too often become a source of personal bondage and a weapon human beings use against each other. Our culture has allowed and encouraged the importance of the sexual

side of our nature to become exaggerated. Then, after succumbing to this pressure, we protest that our “sexual urges are uncontrollable.” The Scriptures teach us otherwise.

Gal 5:16, 22-23 So I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such things there is no law.

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

1Th 4:3-7 It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

As we fail to control our sinful impulses, we often indulge in impure thoughts and open ourselves to seductive influences in what we watch and read, which can lead us ever deeper into sin.

Mat 5:28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Mat 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

James 1:14-15 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.

It should also be noted that sexual sins are self destructive and can have a progressively destructive effect on our lives and the lives of those around us.

1 Cor 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

Gen 18:20-21 Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

Jude 1:7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Violations of another person in acts of rape, molestation, incest, and sexual harassment inflict physical emotional and spiritual harm. These are acts of domination, intimidation and

manipulation of a person without his/her consent. Betrayed trust holds the abused in bondage, imposing powerful barriers to understanding and claiming God’s healing, freedom and victory.

Mat 10:26-28 “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight, what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

However, if the victim acknowledges the hurt, hate and anger and then forgives, the victim can be set free. Forgiving the abuser is neither tolerating nor excusing the abuse, but trusting to God to justly deal with all involved.

Eph 4:26-27 “in your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

Rom 12:19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

Mat 6:12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

1 John 5:4-5 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

This healing can be most effectively done in the body of Christ.

Eccl 4:9-10,12 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Prostitution, infidelity, pornography, and promiscuity are also violations of God’s sacred gift of sexuality. As they do not support respect, intimacy and concern for another person, they are sin. They demean the value and integrity of a person. The Church acknowledges these acts as sins against God and man.

Lev 19:29 Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.

Deu 23:17 No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute.

1 Cor 6:9-10 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

With regard to multiple heterosexual or homosexual relationships, there is the very real and increasing problem of sexually transmitted diseases. We are urged on an increasingly public and frequent basis to practice "safe sex." Nothing in Scripture permits us to link the word "safe" with sexual encounters that occur outside of a godly marriage.

Our struggle with human sexuality is as old as the "fall" in the Garden of Eden and will be with us until time ends. Even with "our" best attempts to control it we often fail; and once we stop seeking God's help, we're hopelessly out-matched by the enemy and his evil plans for us. We have, in the last 40 years, steadily yielded to the idea that our sexual urges are uncontrollable, and now we are living with the consequences of that decision. A decision which has resulted in the pain and brokenness around us and from which we have no fruit to show for all our "progress and scientific enlightenment." Rampant sexual abuse, teenage sex and pregnancies, infidelity, spreading sexual diseases and a growing disrespect for human life are all evidence of the growing lack of control of our sexuality as God intended it.

As Christians, we are called to a higher level of conduct.

Eph 5:34 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

Phil 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.

1 Cor 6:13b The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

Procreation

We, as Christians considering human sexuality, need to recognize and acknowledge that for many, children are one of the most valuable results of the sexual relationship God has given us.

Psa 127:3-5 Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Children, however, are not the only purpose and result of God's gift. Our sexuality also fulfills God's design for enhancing the joy of love within marriage. Since it is not scriptural (1 Cor 7:4-5) to deprive one another sexually, within the bounds of marriage, we believe it is acceptable to use safe, effective birth control methods to promote responsible procreation. It can allow for a full enjoyment of our mutual sexuality, reasonably free from the fear of an unplanned pregnancy. Both the man and the woman should be equally

responsible for the acts and decisions regarding contraception and procreation.⁷

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

In defining the acceptable limits of controlling reproduction, we agree that voluntary sterilization may be an appropriate option. However, abortion is a totally unacceptable means of birth control. Other than the case of a medical emergency where the mother's life is in jeopardy, willful abortion - the deliberate sacrifice of an unborn child - is always an offense against God and the human spirit!⁸

Psa 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

Exo 20:13 You shall not murder.

Mat 19:14 Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

■ Church/Christian Position

What, therefore, should we as individual Christians and the Church as a whole be saying and doing regarding all the varied aspects of human sexuality?

First and foremost, we need to proclaim, endorse and support that which God has established and sanctioned for our benefit. He has ordained a life-long, one man/one woman, marriage relationship (Mark 10:6-9) that is the foundation upon which a family is built and in turn becomes the basis for community and society. People, young and old, need to be encouraged to discipline themselves according to God's commands before marriage; to prepare for and enter marriage with the clear understanding of the length and depth of commitment required (Eph 5:28-32); and to live their lives in such a way as to bring honor to God, themselves and their spouse (Heb 13:4, Mat 5:31-32).

With regard to the sinful use of sexuality, the Church must state clearly and resolutely that it is wrong. We dare not take the responsibility upon ourselves to modify or ignore what God has said, regardless of how loudly advocated or commonplace a sinful practice has become! Failure to stand against these sins and proclaim the grace of God and His forgiveness leaves people drowning in their sin - separated from Jesus.

Gal 5:19-21 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry

and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Heb 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

While we are holding these sins up to God's light, we must remember several basic truths:

1. All of us are sinners and as a result are hopelessly separated from God.

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Isa 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

2. Jesus died for everyone and reaches out to all with salvation.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

3. There is only one way to be saved.

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

The Church, accordingly, must proceed with both love and firmness. The sin must be acknowledged and the repentance sincere. Only then can healing begin. We must thereafter look forward, continuing our support with prayer and extending our help to the penitent.

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

Acts 3:19 Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

1 Cor 13:4-6 Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

With regard for those who have not yet repented of their sin, the Church must remember that it is a community of forgiven sinners. Mindful of the grace given us as sinners, we need to continue reaching out with The Holy Spirit and human

encouragement to those entangled in and harmed by sexual sin. As Christians we must provide opportunities to expose and heal both the wounded and the one who inflicts wounds. Hidden in secrecy and shame, they cannot be healed.

Gal 6:1-2 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Heb 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Endnotes

1. "The Church and Human Sexuality. A Lutheran Perspective" (1993) First Draft of a Social Statement.
2. The Book of Concord, transl. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (1959).
3. "The Report of the Luther-Northwestern Faculty Countering the ELCA Position Paper" Section 4 paragraph 4.
4. "Lutheran Renewal" (Jan. 1994) ELCA "Human Sexuality" Paper, A Response by Larry Christenson, pg. 5.
5. Lutheran Renewal" (Jan. 1994) ELCA "Human Sexuality" Paper, A Response by Larry Christenson, pg. 3.
6. "The Report of the Luther-Northwestern Faculty Countering the ELCA Position Paper" Section 4 paragraph 2.
7. From the ALC statement "Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior" pg. 6.
8. See note 5.