"Glorify God in Your Body"
Illustrating the New Testament Theology of Sexuality
by Tom Shepherd, PhD

Introduction
Presuppositions

This study of human sexuality in the New Testament begins with several presuppositions. I accept the Old and New Testaments as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. As such I take them to be the command and counsel of God for the Christian individually and for the Church as a body. The question of this study is thus not "if God has spoken" nor so much "why God has spoken" but primarily "what God has spoken." The authority of God's Word extends to the end of time. The Apostle Paul gives credence to this concept by his repeated use of "It is written" (gevgraptai – intensive perfect) in proving his points. While the documents were written by the prophets long ago, they are still valid for us today.

This leads to my presupposition about the bridging of time and culture, which I must take a little time to develop. The culture of the first century Mediterranean world was much different from modern Western society today, less different from today's traditional cultures in many locations of the world. It is not the culture of that long ago time and place that is normative for the Christian. Rather it is the teachings of Jesus and the inspired Apostles that are normative. However, all Scripture is incarnated into the language and culture of its times. Is it necessary then, to remove the first century cultural aspects of the New Testament to apply its message to our modern world? I think not.

The difficulty with removing first century cultural features from the New Testament message is threefold. First, it can be difficult to determine which features to remove. We do not always have a clear understanding of the first century culture and thus decisions about cultural aspects of New Testament documents can be inaccurate and subjective.

Second, removing features means the loss of information. If we remove attributes of the text we may be excising data vital to our understanding of the will of God. Or we may not be able to catch the nuance of a teaching because of removing some hint that a cultural feature makes. Furthermore, by removing data we lose the incarnational function going on within the text -- the incarnating features are no longer visible.

Third, seeking to "reincarnate" the message can be a recreating of the account in our own image. Our natural biases tend toward favoring those aspects of a passage that represent our own cultural values. For example, Americans are prone to feel affinity for stories or ideas that support equality, freedom, free speech, and democracy. It is not surprising that they would find authoritarian and autocratic values distasteful.

Rather than dissecting out the clearly discernable features of first century culture from the New Testament I prefer to seek understanding of them within their context (an addition of information, not a subtraction). This is not always easy since the text at times calls the values of my own culture into question. But it seems to me that living with the dissonance for a time helps to effect the reincarnation of the truth into my cultural setting. The Gospel is full of paradoxes. We should not be surprised when they confront us on every page of the New Testament. Thus, this presupposition could be stated as follows: I assume that the "incarnated" text contains both cultural and timeless aspects and that my goal of study is not just the timeless truths, but also the
incarnational process and revelation. In learning the incarnation of the text I am taught how to apply the truth to my setting.

My third and final presupposition flows from the second. Because it is valuable to listen to the incarnation of the truth in the text, it is preferable to present findings by book or groupings of books than to present the data via a predetermined set of ideas. It is more valuable to let the books speak their agenda than to force our questions upon them. It is preferable to use their terminology than to insist on our own. While this is less systematic, it lends itself to gathering as much data as possible to obtain a wide picture. At the end of the study, I will summarize key ideas.

Limitations of the Study

This study is about human sexuality in the theology of the New Testament. While such a topic has a very specific focus, it is rarely if ever discussed in isolation in the New Testament writings. It is usually linked with other related topics -- the home, issues of purity, doctrinal questions such as the Second Coming of Jesus, etc. To focus only on sexuality, would thus do injustice to the testimony of the Apostles on the subject.

However, the topic of sexuality is quite broad on its own, and, as noted above, its linkages in the New Testament are fairly diverse. Such a study could quickly become too extensive and lose its specificity and functionality. Therefore, I have chosen to limit the study in certain key ways. This study will focus on positive aspects of sexuality. It will not deal in depth with such thorny issues as divorce or deviant sexual behavior (adultery, homosexual acts, prostitution, etc.), except as these stand in contrast to legitimate sexual behavior. Too many times the spotlight is placed on what we should not do, and what we should do is left unmentioned. This study will seek to reverse that tendency. Furthermore, this study will look only at selected passages from the Gospels and the writings of the Apostle Paul as an illustration of the New Testament teaching on sexuality.

The Gospels and Acts

The birth of Jesus and sexuality (Matt 1, Luke 1)

The birth of Jesus may seem like a strange place to begin in discussing the New Testament theology of sexuality. But the issue does come up in the narratives of three Gospels -- Matthew, Luke, and John. In each of these Gospels the question of sexuality in relation to the birth of Jesus revolves around Mary being unmarried when she gave birth. In Matthew's account the story focuses on Joseph's view of her pregnancy outside of wedlock. "Now Joseph her husband, because he was a righteous man and did not wish to expose her, wanted to divorce her privately." Matthew 1:19 There are several interesting implications of this text. First, Joseph knew the basics of human biology. This may seem rather obvious, but it counters a modern tendency to see the Biblical world view as solely supernatural or "magical" in outlook. Mary, no doubt, told Joseph that she was pregnant "by the Holy Spirit," but his decision to divorce her indicates that he did not believe her and attributed her pregnancy to an illicit relationship.

This brings us to the second point, more relevant to our discussion. Joseph's decision to divorce Mary is indicative that what she had done was considered morally reprehensible. The text notes that Joseph was a "righteous man." This righteousness could be seen in at least two ways, the first, as a moral sense of what one ought to do -- do the right thing. Joseph being righteous, a man who did things in a correct, moral fashion, Mary being the counterfoil in her immoral behavior of becoming pregnant out of wedlock. Joseph decides to divorce Mary because he is an upright man, but he tempers his justice with mercy -- divorce her privately.

Another way to see this "righteousness" would be as linked to mercy -- Joseph is a righteous man, that is to say, he does not want to expose her, so in mercy (illustrating righteousness here) he chooses to divorce her privately. In Matthew the term "righteous" refers frequently to those who are God's people -- those who do His will, in contrast to evil doers. The term "righteousness" is often linked with those who do things rightly, in accord with the will of God. Thus, it seems more probable that the first understanding is correct, because of his moral rectitude, Joseph decided to divorce Mary.

The linkage this has with the question of sexuality is its implied viewpoint that sexual relations are rightly reserved for marriage. To be morally upstanding, one must not engage in sexual relations outside of marriage. To do so carries grave consequences -- the dissolution of the marriage bond. The way in which the Matthean narrative goes out of its way to show that the case of Mary was different, an exception because of her unique situation, stresses the validity of the underlying moral value -- sexual relations are to be reserved for marriage.

The Lucan birth narrative, interestingly, describes the events of Jesus' birth from Mary's viewpoint. Again, the underlying value of sexual expression being reserved for marriage is
stressed. The angel Gabriel greets Mary and tells her that she will become pregnant and give birth to a child she is to name Jesus (Luke 1:28-33). Mary’s response is recorded in Luke 1:34, “How will this occur, since I do not ‘know’ a man?” “Know” here is in the typical Biblical sense of “have sexual relations.” Mary’s value of chastity underlies the statement, similar to that seen in the rectitude of Joseph in Matthew 1. The beauty of Mary’s character also shines forth as she submits wholeheartedly to the angel’s announcement of how the pregnancy is to occur, “Behold the Lord’s slave girl, let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38).

In the Gospel of John there is no birth narrative, but reference is made to the birth of Jesus in a somewhat veiled way in John 8:42. Jesus is in the midst of arguing with his opponents over the question of true freedom and relationship to God via Abraham. As the discussion heats up, Jesus implies that his detractors are not really children of Abraham. This raises their ire and they respond with the ad hominem argument, “We were not born of fornication!” (John 8:41). The term “fornication” is porneía which is a general term for “illicit sexual relations, fornication, prostitution, unchastity.” The implication of the Jews’ statement is that Jesus Himself was born out of wedlock. The thrust of their statement is that Jesus is someone of low origin, one that cannot take the moral high ground, since His background is morally suspect. Though the setting is quite different than the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, it is interesting that the same value stands as a foundation to this dialogue. Sexual expression is meant for marriage. Outside of marriage it is taken as illegitimate. This value was clearly important in first century Palestine, but the way in which the narratives make use of it, especially Luke and Matthew, demonstrates that it was a central value for the Biblical authors as well. They do not give the slightest hint that it was or is invalid, and their very use and expression of it stresses the validity of its moral teaching.

**Texts on adultery that illustrate purity in marriage (Matt 5:27-30)**

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus addresses questions of sexual mores twice, 5:27-30 concerning adultery, and 5:31-32 concerning divorce. As noted in the introduction, it is not my purpose here to delve into the broad and difficult questions of adultery and particularly divorce. However, each of these passages illustrate a conception of positive sexual behavior by their very denial of the illicit.

In Matthew 5:27-30 Jesus discusses the question of adultery. This and the passage on divorce fall into the teachings of Jesus which flow from the programmatic statement of Matthew 5:17-20 where Jesus upholds the immutable nature of the Law of God. Christ states that He did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. Therefore, one must not expect antinomian trends or a loosening of the Law’s demands in the ways Jesus illustrates His point. To understand the “You have heard it said . . . But I say . . .” formula as an abrogation of the Law’s demands is to misunderstand completely what Jesus is driving at. The Law’s demands are not abolished, they are deepened, made full or complete.

The Lord first recalls the wording of the sixth of the ten commandments -- “You must not commit adultery.” In the ancient world the word “adultery” referred to sexual intercourse with a married woman. It was seen as a violation of the rights and property of the husband. The act of sexual intercourse was integral to the definition. Jesus, however, deepens the understanding of the term “adultery.” In Jesus’ definition, adultery happens in the mind of the man who looks lustfully at a woman.

This text (Matthew 5:28) is often misunderstood. Young men may get the idea that they should not even look at a beautiful young lady. But the Greek text can well be translated as follows: "But I say to you that each man who stares at a woman with the intent to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The "looks at" of this text, blevpwn, is in the present tense, intimating an on-going look -- a stare. But of deeper significance is the fact that the "desire" is in a purpose construction (infinitive of purpose) signifying that the desire precedes the looking. Thus the sin of adultery is already present in the heart and it is for that reason that the man stares at the woman.

The necessity of chastity and purity is underlined by Jesus’ strong statement of “moral surgery” -- the removal of hand or eye that leads to sin to avoid being cast into hell. Thus, as in the birth narratives, the necessity of maintaining the sexual relation inviolate in marriage is strongly emphasized.


As noted earlier, it is not in the purview of the study to discuss divorce, except as it illustrates the New Testament’s positive view of sexuality. In Matthew 5:31-32 and its parallels Jesus prohibits divorce by Christians except for the most dire of situations -- usually reference to the
breaking of the marriage vow in adultery or illicit sexual relations. In the argumentation over which exceptions would rightly fulfill the Lord’s command what is too often overlooked is that Jesus strengthens the marriage covenant -- marriage cannot rightly be left for inconsequential reasons. In denying a multitude of reasons for divorce the Lord stresses the centrality of commitment in Christian marriage.

This becomes clear in the argument over divorce which appears in Matthew 19:1-12 and its parallels. The Pharisees inquire if divorce can be done for any or every cause (ai* tiva). In Jesus’ era two major interpretations held sway, the School of Hillel felt that the text of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 allowed divorce for any reason whatsoever, while the School of Shammai taught that the text in Deuteronomy only supported divorce for sexual sins.

In His reply the Lord refers to the stories of Genesis 1 and 2 and combines them in an interesting way. Jesus states that “the Creator made them male and female from the beginning,” a reference to Genesis 1:27, the poetical description of the making of mankind. In Genesis 1 the creation story is essentially God-focused. The Almighty is at the center of every action in the impressive narrative with its profound introduction, “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth.” It is interesting that in this story the creation of people is primarily described as unitary. "Let us make mankind in our image." The language is not androcentric, but rather anthropocentric, it is the creation of human beings, regardless of their sexuality. Both male and female are human, made in God’s image. Their differentiation from one another (male and female) is introduced only to show that both male and female were made, but the central point is that God created people and they are all made in His image.

But why does Jesus refer to this text? It appears that He is emphasizing the order in which God made the world -- the Creator made both male and female, they both are the image of God as individuals. Thus the “maleness” and “femaleness” of people in our world is a divine plan from the beginning, and each is the image of God.

However, the punch line comes as Jesus then goes on to quote Genesis 2:24, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. And the two will become one flesh.” Jesus links the “for this reason” of Genesis 2:24 with the creation account of Genesis 1:27. The concept of male and female made in the image of God from Genesis 1 becomes the driving force in the union of man and woman in Genesis 2.

The point that Jesus draws from all this is that the joining of the two into one is an act of God. God created the sense of need in Adam by bringing all the animals to him to name, “But for Adam no suitable helper was found.” Genesis 2:20. And then God created the woman from the man’s rib to fulfill the man’s need. Without the process of need recognition, the bond between the man and the woman would have been less than indispensable, less than complete. But God made it so. Jesus solemnly concludes that what God has joined man must not separate. Commitment to the marriage vow is stressed and deepened in a most impressive way.

What follows on Jesus’ conclusion to the teaching on marriage and divorce in Matthew is a statement by His disciples (Matt 19:10), "If the case (ai* tiva) of a man with a woman is like that, then it is not advantageous to marry." The same word "case/cause" (ai* tiva) appears in Matt 19:3, "If it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause." The disciples thus refer back to Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce. Jesus has solemnly stated that divorce cannot be practiced by Christians except for the most dire of circumstances. The disciples refer to His teaching as "the case" in their conditional statement -- "If that is the way it is . . ." Their conclusion is that, in light of Jesus’ teaching, it is not advantageous to marry.

As the disciples’ words include a conditional clause and a conclusion, Jesus’ response to them in Matt 19:11-12 includes a statement and a supporting reason (vs 12 “for” gavr). The disciples’ conclusion begins with a negation and Jesus statement begins with a negation. Thus, the following chiastic pattern becomes apparent in these verses:

If permanence in marriage is the way it is (tovn lovgon touton) in verse 11. Some feel that "this word" refers to Jesus’ teaching in Matt 19:1-9 concerning marriage and divorce. Others feel that “this word” refers to the disciples’ statement "it is not advantageous to marry." If Jesus is referring to His teaching on marriage, then the words "not all understand this word but to those it is given" mean that the teaching of Matt 19:1-9 is a special revelation from God concerning marriage, a revelation that people are unable to understand without God enlightening their minds. Why would God not want them to understand? Jesus does not explain at this point, but elsewhere in Matthew such lack of understanding is based on people’s unbelief, hard heartedness, and unfaithfulness (see Matt 13:10-15; 16:4; 25:14-30).
If, on the other hand, "this word" refers to the disciples' statement that it is not advantageous to marry, then Jesus is saying that not everyone among Christians is called to celibacy, but only those to whom God gives this gift.

Which of these two positions is more likely to be true? The key lies in the chiastic structure noted above. The underlined words in the outer and inner lines are the same in Greek, thus pointing to the chiastic structure. However, we note that the first line and the last line stand in antithesis to one another (Marriage vs Celibacy), thus antithetical chiasm. We may complete the antithesis as follows:

If permanence in marriage is the way it is – **Marriage, God's command**
Then it is not advantageous to marry – **Celibacy because of human rejection**
Not all accept this word but to those it is given – **Marriage, divine revelation**
For there are eunuchs who were that way from birth . . . – **Celibacy because of human acceptance**

With this understanding of the chiasm we can summarize the meaning of this interchange between the disciples and Jesus as follows. The disciples are taken aback by the high calling of Christian marriage which bars divorce except for the most dire of reasons. Their conclusion is that it is better not to marry. That is to say, in the light of the divine revelation and human inadequacy, the prudent course seems to be celibacy. But it is a celibacy based upon human rejection of the divine calling, human inability to fulfill the call of God.

Jesus, counters this with the statement that not all understand this word – the teaching about marriage in verses 1-9. It is important to note that He does not say that they are unable to fulfill this high calling, but that they do not understand the teaching. It is not an intellectual understanding that is missing (the disciples understood the implications of the Lord's teaching), but a spiritual linkage with God which makes possible the fulfillment of Jesus' words. That type of spiritual linkage, a revelation from God, must be given by God and received by the individual in faith.

Jesus then continues with a discussion of celibacy. His statement in verse 12 begins with "for." (gavr). In this case it is not a causal statement giving the reason for the truth in verse 11, but rather a conclusion or inference which follows from the statement in verse 11. Jesus refers to three categories of the celibate, the first two are unchosen (birth defect, castration by others). The third is a chosen celibacy, chosen for the sake of the kingdom of God. Just as the acceptance and living of the divine plan of marriage in verse 11 requires the intervention of and linkage with God, so the Christian who chooses celibacy must do so, not because of human inadequacy to fulfill the divine plan, but for devotion to the kingdom of God. Thus Jesus both maintains the high calling of God in Christian marriage and affirms the single life – but both within the setting of the will and power of God, never in the light of human inadequacy.


In this passage some Sadducees come to Jesus and present a question about the resurrection. The scenario they present is geared to illustrate the absurdity of believing in the resurrection. Seven brothers, via levirate marriage, successively have the same woman as their wife. To show that the doctrine of the resurrection does not make logical sense, the Sadducees ask the rhetorical question, "In the resurrection, therefore, which of the seven will have her as wife? For they all had her as wife." The intent of their logic seems to be that basic morality demonstrates that the resurrection is an absurd doctrine.

Jesus’ response in Matthew and in Mark are fairly similar. The Lord begins by saying the Sadducees are deceived and that for two reasons -- because they do not know the Scriptures (a terrible rebuke for learned men!) nor do they know the power of God. Again, at the end of His remarks Jesus refers to the Scriptural passage about Moses at the bush (they do not know the Scriptures). Thus it would seem that the intervening section (Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25) deals with the issue of "the power of God" as seen in the resurrection from the dead.

The words of Jesus in question have occasioned much controversy. Jesus says, "For in the resurrection they do not marry nor are they given in marriage, but they are like the angels in heaven." (Matthew 22:30, parallel Mark 12:25) Luke's narrative at this point adds fuel to the fire -- "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those accounted worthy to attain that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. For they are no longer able to die, for they are like the angels, and they are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." (Luke 20:35-36). What do these words mean, particularly in connection with the New Testament view of sexuality?

First, neither the Matthean/Markan text, nor the Lucan text speak about marriage in our present world. The Lucan text might be taken that way with its phraseology in verse 35 that those accounted worthy of that age neither marry nor are given in marriage. However, the continuation of the thought in verse 36 helps the reader to recognize that Jesus is speaking of the future...
where the worthy can no longer die, being sons of the resurrection.

Second, Jesus is primarily discussing the subject of resurrection, not marriage, and particularly not marriage in this world. Marriage becomes the focal point only because the Sadducees seek to use it as a means to denigrate the doctrine of the resurrection. However, the Lord does use the opportunity to open the vista of life in God's heavenly kingdom. In that resurrection life there will be a new order of things. Jesus does not go so far as to say that there will be no marriage. He does state that no new marriages will be consummated. However, in light of the context of dispute with the Sadducees over how marriage in this present world would relate to marriage in the future world, it appears that Jesus is arguing against a continuation of our current marriage arrangements in that future kingdom.

Third, for the New Testament view of sexuality this text reminds us that our present world has relationships and realities which are superseded in God's future kingdom. This does not in the least detract from the reality and relevance of marriage in the present world. The Scriptures contain other truths which have a specificity relative to life on earth -- the doctrine of the non-immortality of the soul, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of Last Things. Thus, it is reasonable to expect new realities in God's kingdom that go beyond relationships on earth, while not denigrating the value of the earthly reality. In addition we note that the proper levirate marriages of the seven brothers were all in accord with the revealed will of God. However, their reality does not negate the resurrection. Thus marriage cannot be used to devalue the future kingdom of God, a point with some relevance to the discussion of 1 Corinthians 7 below.

Water to wine at a wedding (John 2:1-11). The woman at the well (John 4:4-42), and the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11)

John's Gospel differs markedly from the Synoptics. The style of writing is simple yet forceful, using a vocabulary deeply profound in its simplicity. Only a few stories are told which illustrate Jesus' ministry, but they are narrated in long detail with many conversations. Three of these stories contain material relevant to the question of sexuality -- the wedding feast at Cana, the woman at the well in Samaria, and the woman caught in adultery. In the wedding feast, the first of Jesus' miracles, the teaching on family life is assumed in the narrative -- Jesus’ presence and assistance in providing for the feast are indicative of His acceptance and approval of the wedding and of marriage, though no explicit statement is made. The Evangelist stresses instead the importance of Jesus’ miracle as "the beginning of [His] signs." (John 2:11). There is a certain Eucharistic overtone to the miracle which commentators have noted.

The story of the woman at the well is more specific in its expression of values. The woman comes to the well at midday, not a typical time for drawing water. She is alone, also atypical in a traditional society where the women would talk together about their families and the village life while getting water. The woman’s reason for coming alone is unstated in the story, but becomes fairly obvious as Jesus talks with her. Reading her life story as an open book, He tells her the truth about her sordid past -- she has had five husbands and the man she now has is not her husband. The story implies more than it tells and invites the reader to consider this woman's plight. When she returns to the town she calls the men and tells of a man who told her everything she ever did. That was why she had gone to the well at noon in the first place, to avoid their gossip. Thus, it is an interesting (and typical) Johannine irony -- in seeking to escape her past the woman meets it at the well, then goes to proclaim the Messiah to her fellow villagers on the grounds of the very message she was seeking to avoid. The secret shame has become the revelation of the Messiah. This in no way places approval on the woman’s former behavior. If the story were endorsing what she had done the irony would lose its power. Thus, the very web of irony in the story illustrates the illicit nature of what the woman was doing, and in contrast, gives silent approval to traditional family values of fidelity and stability in marriage.

The story of the woman caught in adultery appears in John 7:53-8:11. Textual scholars agree that the evidence is strongly against this story being part of the original text of John’s Gospel. This does not mean, however, that it is an unauthentic story about Jesus. It could be an agraphon which circulated during the first century and was early added on to the text of John.

If we assume that the story is authentic its meaning for the question of sexuality revolves around the significance of Jesus' actions in relation to the woman caught in adultery. The Scribes and Pharisees bring the woman to Jesus to find a way to accuse Him. Jesus' ringing rebuke, "The one without sin among you should be the first to cast a stone at her," silences His enemies. They all slip away, beginning with the eldest. Jesus questions the woman, "where are they? Has no one condemned you?" To her affirmative answer the Lord says, "Neither do I condemn you, go, and do not sin any more."
This story has long been a favorite of Christians since it shows the Lord saving and protecting the poor, helpless woman against her attackers. The imagery is so striking -- the haughty religious leaders with their irrefutable logic, "Moses commanded such people to be stoned, so what do you say?", the totally humiliated woman caught in the very act of adultery placed in the midst, the center of attention, and the silent Jesus bending down and writing in the dust. The imagination can dwell long on the scene. The contrast of humiliation and pride, holiness and wickedness, could hardly be more starkly presented. It is truly a story about grace.

But does it also teach an acceptance of adultery or a softening of covenantal claims in marriage. Does Jesus remove the penalty for committing adultery? The text does not support such a conclusion. Crucial to understanding the intent of the story in this regard are two elements of the narrative. The first is Jesus’ question to the woman -- "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" If no one brings a charge the person is free and the Law still holds true. The woman’s response of "No one, Lord." means that the case is dismissed. The Law is not on trial. Secondly, Jesus does give the woman both a verdict and a command. He does not condemn her (his verdict), not because she is innocent, but because of His grace as Messiah, the One who can forgive sins. He commands her, "Go, and from now on, sin no more." This command is also a verdict. She has committed sin in adultery, and is therefore guilty ("no more" indicates that the sin was committed). Again, the Law is upheld as true, but the Messiah has forgiven the offender and calls on her to live the gracious forgiveness He has provided -- go and sin no more. It is true that the stoning does not occur, but the call of grace provides a changed life that will fulfill the Law in a new life.

In summary we see the Gospels standing firmly for the family values of chastity, fidelity, and the enduring covenantal nature of marriage. These emphases are found in the explicit and implicit teachings and actions of Jesus. The Gospels consistently support these values.

The Pauline Epistles

Several general issues arise in a discussion of Paul’s view on sexuality. The first issue is which of the letters in the New Testament were actually written by the Apostle. Quite a few scholars count Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and the Pastoral Epistles as DeuteroPauline. However, more conservative scholars take the entire set of canonical Epistles as genuine. For some this might not seem a major point if all the books are accepted as inspired. However, the practical outworking of taking some of the epistles as DeuteroPauline is the setting of the "true" Pauline letters and their theology over against the theology of the DeuteroPauline letters. The DeuteroPauline letters are at times seen as a domestication of the vigorous Pauline Gospel, a caving in to church institutionalization in the second generation. Without entering into a debate over the question of pseudonymity, I will simply state that I assume here the authenticity of the letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament and will illustrate their theology as a whole.

A second issue relating to Paul’s teaching is its relationship to the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. Some scholars see a dichotomy between what Paul teaches and the message of Jesus. Jesus appears oriented quite strongly towards ethics and repentance, whereas Paul focuses on righteousness by faith apart from Law and the believer’s spiritual linkage to Christ. Paul speaks little of the earthly Jesus and His teaching, and thus, for some, the Gospel the Apostle teaches appears to be a strongly Hellenized form of Christianity without many linkages to the Galilean and His teachings.

Setting up a dichotomy between Jesus and Paul is mistaken for two reasons. First, the Gospels and the Epistles have different topics as their foci. The Gospels detail the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, while the Epistles are correspondence dealing with church problems in a Diaspora setting. It is not surprising that they differ in style and content. This does not make them opposed to one another, but rather complementary. Second, Paul always places himself subservient to Christ, never against Him and His teachings. It is hard to see how the Apostle would oppose the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels given his submission to the risen Christ.

Finally, a third issue -- which passages in Paul’s writings to focus on. A number of passages deal with issues related to sexuality. A number of them speak of what the Christian is to avoid, but two passages in particular speak about what the Christian is to do within the marriage relationship -- 1 Corinthians 6-7 and Ephesians 5. Whereas these illustrate many of Paul’s concepts about marriage, I will focus on these two passages rather than give an overview of many others.

The Christian and sexuality (1 Corinthians 6-7)

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul concludes discussion of specific problems that he feels must be addressed within the Christian community in Corinth. His discourse to this point in the book has dealt with divisions in the church (chapters 1,3), the true wisdom (chapters 1-2), the meaning of apostleship and discipleship (chapter 4), incest (chapter 5), and lawsuits between believers (chapter 6). At the end of chapter 6 he returns to the problem of sexuality, but this time dealing
with the question of prostitution. This last passage serves as an excellent transition to chapter 7 where the Apostle will begin to deal with questions that the Corinthians themselves have raised. Chapter 6:12-20 is a good transition for two reasons -- its subject matter dovetails with that of chapter 7, and Paul begins to use Corinthian slogans and answers them -- a foreshadowing of the response to questions the Corinthians raised in a letter to Paul.

An important starting point for a discussion of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 is comprehending how the Apostle argues. It appears that Paul quotes popular phrases in vogue in Corinth at the time. These slogans appear in 1 Corinthians 6:12, 13, 18. They are as follows:

6:12 "All things are lawful for me"
6:13 "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both"
6:18 "Every sin which a person commits is outside the body"

In each case the Apostle's answer immediately follows and begins with a "but" (ἀλλὰ, ἀλλά) and contradicts the slogan, but interestingly, not in a harsh dogmatic way, but rather by way of gentle, almost subtle reasoning.

The passage can be broken down into two parts 6:12-18a and 6:18b-20. In each of these sections there is a Corinthian assertion or slogan, which is then followed by Paul's response. This is followed in turn by two Pauline arguments which usually start with "Don't you know?" and then a final exhortation. In the first section the pattern is as follows:

A. Corinthian assertion -- "All is lawful to me."
B. Pauline response -- Not all is beneficial, I will not be mastered by anything
C. Corinthian assertion -- "Food for the stomach, and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both."
D. Pauline response -- The body is not for immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. God raised the Lord and will raise us.
E. First Pauline argument -- Don't you know your bodies are parts of Christ?
F. Second Pauline argument -- Don't you know the one joined to a harlot is one body with her?
G. Final exhortation -- Flee immorality

Where did the Corinthians get their slogan or assertion, "All is lawful to me"? It may have been a misunderstanding of Paul's own position (cf. Gal 5:1,13). Paul taught freedom from circumcision as the indicator or requirement of entrance into the body of Christ (cf. Gal 2:1-5). In conjunction with this he came to see that Law was not the means of justification (Rom 3:21, 28). Law points out sin but cannot resolve the problem, only faith in Christ justifies the sinner (Rom 3:20-26).

But the Corinthians misunderstood this teaching (if that is, indeed, where they obtained their view). They felt that the new relationship to Christ made law meaningless in relationship to the present life -- all is lawful to me. Where this concept led them becomes quickly apparent as Paul's argumentation proceeds.

The Apostle seems rather mild in his response, "but not all benefits." He does not immediately deny the validity of the Corinthian slogan, but rather modifies its extent. He accepts their premise, but shows that it is an incomplete statement. The concept of "all is lawful" becomes inadequate to guide the Christian in everyday life since it is unable to distinguish between the beneficial and the harmful.

Paul requotes their slogan and proceeds to his second statement, "but I will not be mastered by anything." Here he exposes the outcome of the "all is lawful" viewpoint. Ironically, it is not freedom, but slavery -- mastery by that from which one felt he was liberated. In making this statement Paul destroys the logic of an "all is lawful" outlook. Not only is it unable to distinguish the worthwhile from the detrimental, it frankly leads to slavery. At this point we see the wisdom of his dialogic approach. The Corinthians he is addressing believed in a libertine lifestyle. One does not win such people by appeal to authority. Instead, the Apostle engages the intellect and will -- he reasons out the implications of their position and demonstrates its deficiencies. By reason rather than rejection, he wins his listeners to his point of view.

Paul then proceeds to quote another Corinthian slogan, "food for the stomach, and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both." The Corinthian argument is both teleological and eschatological in nature. In their teleology, design indicates function. Body parts have functions that they should naturally fulfill. The illustration of the stomach and foods is a euphemism for the sexual organs and intercourse. The Corinthians bolstered their teleological view of life with an eschatological concept -- "God will destroy both." Thus, on the one hand their teleological concept would lead to free sexual expression, one might say, promiscuity by design; and on the other hand, since God will destroy the body and material foods, what we do in this material life is of no consequence to our eternal life in the future. It is a dualistic view of the world and Christian life, the material is separate from the spiritual.
Paul responds by first answering their teleology and then their eschatology. He modifies both. In the Pauline teleology the body is not made for immorality (porneiva) but for the Lord. In opposition to a dualistic dichotomy between the spiritual and the material, Paul teaches that the design of the material is for union with the Lord, who is a spiritual being. The Christian life in this world is an investing of the material with the power of the risen Lord. Rather than discounting the significance of the material as meaningless, the Apostle acknowledges both its importance and its potential when linked to Jesus Christ. We are designed, in our material life, to be linked to Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this linkage to Christ is incompatible with immorality. Paul will explain this in more detail later in the passage, but at this point it is implied that either we are incapable of linkage with both the Lord and immorality, or that there is some incompatibility between the Lord and immorality.

Next, Paul brings to bear an important New Testament concept in countering the Corinthians' eschatology, the resurrection. God raised the Lord and He will raise us through His power. The Lord Jesus is central to both the argument about teleology and that concerning eschatology. The resurrection of Jesus is both the seal of God upon His mission as Savior and the assurance of our future resurrection. In contrast to the dualism of the Corinthians that sees the body as something God will destroy, Paul asserts that God will raise our bodies. Thus, where they see license for promiscuity in an eschatology of destruction, Paul sees protection of Christian moral life in an eschatology of resurrection. The Eschaton does not teach that we may do as we please, but rather that we must live for the Lord since we must give account for the things we do "through the body" (2 Cor 5:10).

This brings Paul to the first of his two arguments -- your bodies are parts of Christ. The Apostle injects his theology of the church at this point. He will express it more fully in chapters 12-14. In 1 Cor 12:12 in his discourse on spiritual gifts in the church he states, "For just as the body is one and it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, although they are many, are one body, so also it is with Christ." One might expect Paul to say, "so also it is with the church." But he does not. In Paul's view, so closely is the church linked to Jesus Christ that at times he can speak of the church as Christ Himself. It is reminiscent of Paul's own experience of conversion on the road to Damascus. When struck down by the light he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Paul asked who it was and the voice responded, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." (Acts 9:4-5). So close is the linkage between Christ and His church that to persecute one is to hurt the Other.

Thus, continuing his emphasis on wholism (as opposed to dualism), the Apostle links the Corinthian practice of linkage to a prostitute as actually linking Christ to a prostitute -- an unthinkable concept! This impossibility carries with it the implication that when a Christian links himself to a prostitute that he consequently separates himself from Christ. Prostitution means apostasy from the Lord.

Paul drives the point home with his second argument -- the one who unites himself with a prostitute is one body [with her]. Paul quotes the text of Gen 2:24 to prove his point. The two become one flesh. Thus, the Christian who unites himself to a prostitute has united his life with her and removed himself from the fellowship of Christ and His church. Sin in the body has spiritual effects. But Paul prefers to end on a positive note -- the one who unites himself with the Lord is one spirit [with Him]. The unity of man makes it impossible for one to unite with a prostitute and unite with the Lord. It is one or the other. This brings Paul to his terse summary command -- flee immorality!! It is not difficult to understand this in light of the strong arguments presented.

The second section of the passage follows the same pattern as the first:

A. Corinthian assertion -- "Every sin which a person does is outside the body."
B. Pauline response -- "But the one who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."
C. First Pauline argument -- Don't you know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?
D. Second Pauline argument -- You are not your own, you were bought with a price.
E. Final exhortation -- Glorify God in your body

In 1 Cor 6:18b Paul takes on another of the Corinthian slogans, "Every sin which a person does is outside the body." In most translations the word "other" is inserted after "every." This helps to make sense of the passage if it is taken as a Pauline statement rather than a Corinthian slogan. But seeing it as a Corinthian slogan removes the difficulty and obviates the necessity of supplying a word.

Continuing their dualistic viewpoint the Corinthians' slogan maintains that sin is outside the body. In this theology of sin, the physical body is not a moral agent and anything that occurs within the body is morally neutral. In this light, once again, consorting with a prostitute is acceptable for the Christian.

As before, the Apostle does not make a frontal attack on this position but limits its scope. He states, "but the one who practices sexual immorality sins against his own body." The words for
"his own" here are ςι*ίτην τοῦ ἱδίον which give the idea of "self" or "pertaining to oneself." Paul's words indicate that the sin of sexual immorality affects the self, and particularly the bodily life of the self. Arguing from Paul's statement, it is clear that the Corinthian stance is incorrect. Of all sins, the sin of sexual immorality has an effect in the body.

But Paul does not leave the matter on this negative note. He now presents two further arguments and an exhortation, following the pattern of the first section of the passage. The Apostle asks, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" Interestingly, the "your" is plural but the "body" is singular. Some may see in this a reference to the body of the Church, but that is unlikely here. In the one location in the passage that clearly refers to the Church, verse 15, Paul refers to "your bodies" and speaks of them as parts "of Christ." Thus, in verse 15, the plural group of Christians are parts of Christ. But in verse 19 the reference is to one body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. While the ecclesiological symbol is present, or more accurately the sacral language of temples, it would be strange for the Apostle to suddenly change from speaking about an individual in verse 18 and then switch to a plural or communal sense in verse 19. So why the plural "your"? Probably because of the dialogical form of Paul's argumentation. The epistle was meant to be read before the congregation, and thus the Apostle shifts to a plural for all in the congregation to be included. It is a not uncommon phenomenon in Paul's letters where a plural pronoun deals with a singular (but not collective) subject (cf. the "our" in Rom 6:6, the "your" in Rom 6:12,19, the "our" in 2 Cor 5:1).

The sacral language of temples in invoked. In some way the concept of the Christian's body being a temple of the Holy Spirit is meant to draw one back from involvement in sexual immorality. On what grounds? Anciently, temples were depositories of wealth and this needed protection. The way this was done was by temple police and by the threat of a curse from the god if one were to violate the temple sanctuary. As Paul states in 1 Cor 3:17, "If someone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him." In chapter 3 the reference is to those who would destroy or divide the Christian church's unity. But in chapter 6 the Apostle's discussion deals with the individual Christian's life in the world. Just as the entire church body is where the Holy Spirit dwells, so the individual Christian is a depository or sanctuary for the treasure of God's Spirit. This sacred presence is violated at great peril to the believer.

It is interesting that in 1 Corinthians the Apostle refers to the Trinity in a number of passages and their involvement in the life of the Christian. In 1 Cor 2:1-5 the subject is the preaching of the Gospel. Paul refers to the mystery of God; that he did not want to know anything but Jesus Christ crucified; and that his message came in the demonstration of the Spirit. In 1 Cor 12:4-6 the subject is spiritual gifts and he notes that there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are diversities of service and the same Lord; and there are diversities of activities but the same God. Then there is our current passage of 1 Cor 6:12-20 where God raised the Lord Jesus; the Christians are parts of Christ (Who cannot be joined to a prostitute); and the Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian allusions seem quite marked and demonstrate the unity of the Godhead in the work of salvation. In the preaching of the Gospel, in the Christian's moral life, and in the giving of spiritual gifts, the Trinity brings its combined power to bear.

This leads to another interesting observation concerning unity in this passage. We have already noted earlier that the unity of man is a theme of the chapter. Here we note that other unities are brought to bear on the question of the moral life in this passage as well. The unity of man demonstrates that the spiritual life cannot be separated from the physical life or vice versa. The unity of the Church also stands in opposition to a dualistic approach to morality -- Christ cannot be joined to a prostitute! Again, the unity in marriage expressed by the quotation of Gen 2:24 where the "two shall become one flesh" illustrates that someone who consorts with a prostitute becomes joined to her and separated from Christ. And finally, the unity of the Trinity combats the evil of a dichotomized life. All the unities stand together in an incredible theological bulwark against the evils of an immoral life.

After the reference to the Christian's body as temple, the Apostle brings his second argument in this section -- you are not your own, for you were bought for a price. This language probably has reference to sacral manumission where a slave was freed at a temple ceremony. Reminiscent of Rom 6:17-23, the Christian has been set free from sin as master and now comes into the service of righteousness. This precludes a life of slavery to sin. The Christian is to follow the positive command, "Glorify God in your body." Obviously the glory of God has no part with sexual immorality. The Christian is called to sexual purity. The Apostle's teaching on this is based upon the four-fold pillars of the unity of man, the unity of the Trinity, the unity of the Church, and the unity of marriage.

In chapter 7 Paul takes up questions that the Corinthian believers have written to him about. This entire chapter deals with the question of marriage, celibacy, and sexual relations. The pattern of Paul's discourse is as follows:
A. Sexual relations in marriage -- not to be denied 7:1-6
B. God’s gifts to the Church in sexual life -- unmarried, married, married to unbelievers -- follow your calling 7:7-24
C. Virgins and marriage in the time of crisis -- the value of staying single, the acceptability of marriage 7:25-39

I will not enter into a extended exegesis of this passage but only make summary statements which present Paul’s major teachings.

In 1 Cor 7:1-6 the Apostle deals with those who favor Christian celibacy as a requirement for the entire Christian community. This is enunciated in their slogan, "it is good for a man not to ‘touch’ a woman." "Touch" here is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. It appears that these ascetics were promulgating the concept that even married couples should not have sexual relations, since Paul specifically deals with sexual relations within the marriage bond. What is the background of this asceticism in Corinth? It is a bit difficult to say, since Paul does not explain his opponents' viewpoint completely. Hurley suggests that it is a realized eschatology ("we already are raised with Christ") in combination with the Old Testament concept of priests keeping themselves from sexual intercourse at the time of special meetings with God (cf. Lev 22:4, Ex 19:15). Talbert suggests a similar root in a realized eschatology in combination with Jesus’ words that after the resurrection Christians would be like the angels, not marrying or giving in marriage.

Paul opposes such a view. He teaches in 1 Cor 15 and Rom 6 that our resurrection is still future, and he reaffirms the positive view of sexuality in agreement with the Old Testament positive view of sexuality. In 1 Cor 7:1-6 he stresses the equality and mutual duty of the sexual relationship in Christian marriage. His words in 1 Cor 7:3-5a are worth quoting:

The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but her husband does, and likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body but his wife does. Do not deny one another .

One could not ask for a much clearer expression of equality, a shocking concept in a male-dominated traditional society. But Paul’s words go beyond merely a concept of equality, they also contain the thought of duty. It may seem strange to suggest that having sexual relations is a duty. Why would anyone not enjoy and desire such relations? It might seem like telling a child that he has to eat his ice cream. But obviously Paul was faced with those who felt morally justified in refusing to have such relations. The Apostle counters that not only are sexual relations acceptable in marriage, they are, in fact, a positive duty! It is the will of God for married people to have sexual relations.

But Paul must still answer the trend toward asceticism that appears in the Old Testament stories about keeping oneself pure when meeting with God. Paul does not deny such a practice, but in 1 Cor 7:5 he strongly limits its application as follows:

1. Any sexual abstinence in marriage must be by mutual agreement (συμφωνεῖν) between husband and wife.
2. It must be for a limited time (καιρὸν).
3. The purpose for the abstinence is to allow more leisure time (σκολασθεῖν) for prayer.
4. The abstinence must not go on indefinitely, the couple must return to their normal sexual relations.

Having clarified his position on the positive nature of sexuality in marriage, Paul goes on in 1 Cor 7:7-24 to speak of God’s gifts and commands for sexual life for the unmarried, those married to Christians, and those married to unbelievers. To the first group he recommends a continuation in the single state -- a surprise in light of his discussion in verses 1-6. Paul will explain in more detail at the end of the chapter his reasoning. One would expect a rather strong explanation in light of the abstinence done for the wrong reasons at Corinth. This explanation appears in verses 25-38, although verses 17-24 present an important argument concerning this as well. I will discuss these verses below.

In verses 10-16 Paul presents his teaching on married life. It is a nuanced understanding of the teaching of Jesus within the believer/unbeliever setting. Paul’s famous "not I, but the Lord," "I say, not the Lord," is nothing else than a recognition of and agreement with the logions of our Lord as expressed in such passages as Mark 10 and Matthew 5 and 19. Christians are to take marriage very seriously and not divorce. In his counsel to those married to unbelievers Paul again emphasizes the need for continuity in the marriage relationship. As long as the unbeliever agrees to remain in the marriage, the believer should also do so, the marriage relationship is not unclean or unholy because the believer is married to an unbeliever. The believer can be the means of winning the unbeliever to Christ.

But a note of clarification must be made at this point to avoid misunderstanding. Some Christians may get the mistaken idea that Paul is telling a Christian to stay with an unbeliever even when the unbeliever becomes abusive. This is not so. Paul states in verse 15 that if the
unbeliever departs from or divorces the believer let him/her do so. The brother or sister is not bound in such cases, suggesting the Christian does not have culpability in this case and could, presumably, remarry. God has called us to peace. When an unbeliever abuses a believer in a relationship he/she is driving the believer away, saying in effect, "I want to separate" and breaking the "peace" God has established. When a believer abuses a believer it is grounds for Church discipline and, if the abuse does not stop, disfellowship.

In 7:17-24 Paul links two important concepts in relation to marriage and the single life – walking in what God has "measured" to each one and walking in the "calling" God gave each one. That which God "measures" or "divides" to Christians is usually reference to spiritual gifts from God (cf Rom 12:3). If one is gifted with singleness, that is where he/she should walk. If one is gifted with married life, that is where he/she should remain.

With reference to "calling" Paul presents several examples outside the realm of sexual relationships which help to illuminate what he means. He refers to circumcision and uncircumcision, slavery and freedom. The first illustration of circumcision and uncircumcision seems fairly clear. The Apostle refers to the typical dichotomy between the circumcised (Jews) and the uncircumcised (Gentiles). This distinction disappears in Christ. As Paul puts it in verse 19, "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. What counts is keeping of God's commandments." Thus, one should not seek to change that which is a non-issue or insist that others change to fulfill standards which God no longer requires. The application to the ascetics is clear – their insistence that sexual relationships even in marriage should be abandoned does not come from God and thus should not be insisted upon. Paul concludes that each one should remain in "the calling in which he was called."

At this point it is useful to clarify the meaning of the term "calling" (kli\'si\'li) and its cognate verb "to call, summon" (kalevw). There are two options in this passage. One meaning for kli\'si\'li is "station in life" "position" or "vocation." The other option is "calling." The former option is illustrated in the RSV translation of the passage ("Every one should remain in the state in which he was called." 1 Cor 7:20 RSV). However, elsewhere in Paul's writings the term kli\'si\'li always refers to God's choice of a person for salvation, which would be more in line with a translation of "calling." The use of the verb kalevw in this passage also favors the understanding of kli\'si\'li as "calling" in the sense of being called to salvation, since the verb is used here only of an action of God, not of a situation in which one finds oneself, and elsewhere when Paul speaks of God calling people he refers to salvation. Verse 18 illustrates this well "Someone who was called when already circumcised should not seek to be uncircumcised. Someone who was called in uncircumcision should not seek to be circumcised." It would seem that kli\'si\'li stands outside of a person's station in life (circumcised, uncircumcised, married, or unmarried). The point is that the call to salvation is the defining experience of life, not the status in which you find yourself.

Paul's second illustration helps to clarify this in an interesting way, for he allows for change in life status. Paul first addresses the slave and says that he should not let his situation of slavery bother him (again, the "calling" of salvation in Christ is more important). But then the Apostle goes on to say in the end of verse 21, "but if you are also able to gain your freedom, make all the more use of the opportunity." Although the meaning of the last phrase is debated, its most like meaning is that Paul is encouraging slaves to seek their freedom. This would mean a change in life station, but not in "calling."

Thus, Paul presents an illustration where life station should not change (do not seek uncircumcision or circumcision), since to seek a change would deny the meaning of the "calling." Then, he presents an illustration where life station should very well change (seek freedom from slavery), for to do so is in complete harmony with the "calling."

What does all this mean for the question of sexuality? The term "measured" (merivw = "to divide, distribute") used in this passage suggests that God gives various people the gift to live either the single or the married life, somewhat like the giving of spiritual gifts. But whether one's gift is marriage or singleness, this is all exceeded by the calling of God to salvation. The calling is what defines the Christian's life and provides our likeness to one another even when our gifts vary. God is the One who calls and sets us in the walk of salvation.

In 7:25-40 the Apostle turns to the question of the unmarried. Both male and female can be in view in the term "virgin," though Paul focuses on single females. His counsel is that they remain single. He gives two supporting reasons. The first appears in verse 26 – the present distress. Apparently the church in Corinth was experiencing a time of persecution which made normal life very stressful. It is reminiscent of Jesus' words in Matthew 24:15-19 where He refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. The world is turned topsy-turvy in such situations. That which is usually considered a blessing (such as being pregnant, breast feeding babies, or being married) becomes a curse. However, even in this setting Paul, with his eye on the ascetics, goes out of his way to stress that marriage is not a sin. What drives the Apostle in his counsel is that "time is short."
first this may appear to indicate that Paul felt the coming of Jesus was near, at hand. However, 2 Thess 2 shows that he realized that some time must elapse before the Lord’s return. Rather, Paul’s words can be again placed in parallel with those of Jesus in Matthew 24. Just as the Master used the fall of Jerusalem to illustrate the End of the World, so Paul uses the present crisis in Corinth to illustrate the same great End.

All the above dovetails into Paul’s second reason for singleness – a desire to spare the Corinthians from anxiety and care (7:32-35). Paul again goes out of his way to state that he is not trying to limit the Corinthians’ freedom to marry (verse 35). Probably he once again has the ascetics in view, those who would deny sexual relations to all. In verses 36-38 Paul applies this teaching in reference to a Christian couple contemplating marriage or singleness. While Paul feels it is better to stay single, nevertheless, marriage is not rejected. In verses 39-40 he reiterates the binding claims of Christian marriage and indicates that remarriage for the Christian who has lost a spouse to death must always be “in the Lord,” that is, Christians should only marry Christians.

In summary of 1 Corinthians 6-7 we see that the Apostle very strongly forbids sexual relations outside of marriage, based on the fourfold unity of the Trinity, the Church, marriage, and Man. Further, he presents as a positive duty the sexual relationship within marriage and he rejects the arguments of ascetics that sexual relations should be discarded by all. Paul does approve and recommend the single life on the basis of troublous times the Corinthians were facing and a desire to spare them worry and care. However, even in these circumstances he continues to approve of marriage “in the Lord.” Paul’s exposition endorses both the physical nature of our world with the unity of a person, and the reality of the spiritual realm and God’s coming Kingdom. The core problem of the Corinthians was a denial of either one or the other of these realities. Christian marriage lives within both realms and sexuality finds it proper role and fulfillment when both realities are acknowledged.

Household Rules (Eph 5:21-6:9)

In Ephesians 5 and 6 Paul presents his Haustafel or Household Rules. These are a greatly expanded form of his same teaching in Colossians 3:18-25. Scholars have noted parallels between Paul’s household rules and those of non-Christian authors of his era. This may imply to some that Paul merely reflects his times and that because his era is at such a distance from our own day his commands do not apply to us today. As we will see below, a number of factors in the passage stand against such a viewpoint.

In presenting his Haustafel in Ephesians 5 and 6, Paul follows a pattern. The passage may be outlined as follows:

A. Central Principle – Submission to one another in the Fear of Christ 5:21
B. Wives and Husbands 5:22-33
   Wives to submit 5:22-24
   Husbands to love 5:25-32
   Summary of commands to husbands and wives 5:33
C. Children and Parents 6:1-4
   1. Children to obey 6:1-3
   2. Parents not to provoke but to train 6:4
D. Slaves and Masters 6:5-9
   1. Slaves to obey and serve well 6:5-8
   2. Masters to do likewise, eschewing threats 6:9

Several patterns are visible. Those addressed are grouped in pairs with the submitting person always addressed first, and the person in authority addressed second. The submitting persons are groups in the household who are mutually exclusive (wives are not children, children are not slaves, slaves are not wives). However, the persons in authority are not mutually exclusive (husbands are fathers and they were also the masters in the ancient household). Two groups receive more instruction than the others, one a group in authority (husbands), the other a group in submission (slaves). Of the total of 328 Greek words in the passage 5:22-6:9 in the Nestle-Aland 27th edition of the New Testament, each group receives the following amount of instruction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaking to</th>
<th>Number of Words</th>
<th>% of Total Words</th>
<th>% of instruction to pair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wives</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two things are especially striking about this comparison. First, in the paired groups it is usually the group under submission which receives the greater percentage of the instruction, but this is reversed in the case of wives and husbands, with the husbands receiving nearly 80% of the instruction. Second, deepening the first point, husbands receive nearly half the total instruction in the passage. Obviously, it is the husband who needed to hear the instruction of the Apostle more than others in the household, possibly because of his leadership role in the ancient household (honoring the leader), but more likely because of the way in which Christianity revised the concept of leadership.

The beginning of the passage in 5:21 is interesting on several levels. First, the Apostle presents the one general principle which guides his entire discourse – "submit to one another in reverence (fear) for Christ." Throughout the passage Christ will be the pattern for each person in the household. Again and again Paul refers to this, remaining true to this seminal idea.

Second, the verb "submit" is a participle in Greek, a somewhat unusual way to begin a section. In fact, although it is the beginning of a new section in Ephesians, in another sense it is the continuation of the previous section which begins in 5:15. In 5:15-20 the Apostle talks about living the Christian life in wisdom. He instructs the Ephesian Christians to redeem the time. They are not to be foolish but understand the will of the Lord. They are not to get drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit. Beginning in verse 19 Paul gives a series of five modal participles which illustrate just how the Christian is to demonstrate the Spirit-filled life. They are:

- Speaking Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves
- Singing and singing praises in your heart to the Lord
- Giving thanks always for all things in the name of the Lord
- Submitting to one another in reverence for Christ

This illustrates that the rules for the Christian household spring from and are empowered by the Spirit-filled life. Without this connection the commands of the Haustafel cannot be fulfilled!

Third, it is unlikely that the term "to one another" in 5:21 means "mutual submission" of everyone in the household to one another. As noted above, verse 21 is a general principle which holds for the entire passage 5:21-6:9. However, it is quite clear in reading the passage that parents are not called upon to submit to their children, nor masters to slaves. The one relationship where this appears to raise contention is that of husband and wife, and the concept of mutual submission softens what appears to be a rather harsh and male dominant relationship. While the context is against a "mutual submission" viewpoint, nevertheless, we will return to this idea below, noting just how Paul interprets the idea of submission and leadership.

Instruction to wives takes up verses 22 to 24. Paul's central concept here is submission to the husband. The Greek word behind this is υποτάσσω. It is a compound word from υπό meaning "under," and τάσσω, a verb with wide usage, such as in the military realm, meaning "to place" as in placing soldiers under the command of a captain, or arranging soldiers for battle. It also means "appoint" or "establish an order" used in the context of arranging religious festivals or appointing of officials. υποτάσσω in the active voice means "to subject" or "to subjugate." In the middle or passive voice, as here in 5:21-22, it means "to submit oneself." The wives are thus addressed as moral agents and called upon voluntarily to submit themselves to their husbands. Husbands are not called upon to subject or subjugate their wives.

It seems like such a harsh word, this "submit," as though the wife is to give up her individuality and desires or interests. But Paul places this within the context of the relationship to the Lord Jesus, "as to the Lord." The pattern for the home relationship is the Christian's bond to Christ. And it is clear that the believer submits to the will of Christ. But this does not destroy individuality but rather frees and enhances it (cf. John 8:34-36). Paul deepens the power of the statement by reference to the husband (and Christ) as "head." The term suggests authority and leadership.

At this point a few misconceptions about the meaning of submission must be cleared away. Submission does not suggest inferiority. In Luke 2:51 the same term "submit" is used to refer to the relationship of Jesus to His parents. He returned to Nazareth and submitted to them. It is obvious that Jesus was in no way inferior to His parents. The preceding story in Luke about His visit to the temple indicates His growing awareness that His filial relation was to God the Father. Thus, submission of a wife to her husband does not suggest that she is any way inferior to him.

Headship does not imply dominance. It is the world that holds to that idea. But Christian theology is firmly against such use, or abuse, of power and authority. Jesus plainly teaches in
Matthew 20:25-28 that Christian leadership is about service and sacrifice, not dominance and self-aggrandizement. In fact, the paradox of Christianity, that loss is gain (cf. Mark 8:34-38) appears quite strongly in Ephesians 5-6. We should not be surprised to see it in the Christian home, since it is a home that is Christian. This is one of the reasons why we can maintain that the Haustafel apply to us today – to suggest their dismissal as a relic from an ancient culture, is to miss the Christian paradox in the passage. If there is not loss in our lives, sacrifice of ourselves for others, do we obtain the gain of the Gospel in our practical experience?

As noted above, husbands receive the lion’s share of instruction in the Haustafel, nearly half of all the instruction, and, interestingly, about 80% of the instruction given to the wife/husband pair. We noted also that this last percentage is an inversion of the usual pattern where the submitting partner receives the greater amount of instruction. A possible explanation of this emphasis on the instruction to the husbands was noted also -- the Christian view of leadership, so radically different from that in the world.

It is worthwhile to note just what power husbands had in the home of the ancient world. It was a male dominant society to be sure. A famous quote from about 340 B.C. by the Greek writer Ps.-Demosthenes is often quoted in this regard, "We have courtesans for our pleasure, prostitutes for daily physical use, wives to bring up legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters." Wives often had few rights and were treated as property in many cases. However, as Marcus Barth points out in his commentary on Ephesians, this picture of total male dominance and the treatment of women as property or mere sexual objects, was not universal in the ancient world. For instance, in Rome there was a form of marriage where a wife did not become a possession of her husband by spending at least three days a year in the home of her parents. Women of social standing could be involved in academic studies and worship ceremonies. In Plato’s Republic women are given essentially equal status with men in political, educational, and military roles, though commensurate with their lesser physical strength. Aristotle felt that marriage was to be a community of love in which each partner brought particular gifts to the union. Stoic philosophers also praised love, virtue, and partnership in marriage.

While there were writings supporting the rights of women, it is also clear that women were treated as property, were used and abused in the ancient world. Paul’s instructions for the Christian household are sufficient evidence for the need for change in how the household was run. If husbands were already treating wives correctly, there would hardly be need to give such extended instruction.

In such a male dominant milieu, it is interesting that Paul begins his instruction to husbands not with rulership, but with an injunction to love. While this term "love" includes the sexual relationship, it is not primarily about sexual relations in this context. Paul continues his pattern of referring to Christ as the model for the Christian. The husband is to love the wife, "as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her." The goal of Christ in giving Himself for the Church is dwelt on in detail -- a self-sacrificing love with the uplifting and improvement of the other in view. It is the αγαπή type of love referred to, so wonderfully defined in 1 Cor 13 -- love that acts with patience and shows kindness, does not act jealously or boast, does not keep track of wrongs, nor rejoice in injustice, but rejoices together with the truth. It is a love which bears the weight of another's trials, believes the best about him/her, hopes for the highest, patiently endures trials, never fails.

This is the love the husband is called on to demonstrate toward his wife. It calls into question all of the pagan sense of rulership and use of women as property for personal gain. It is reminiscent of Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 20 referred to above in which the leader is to be the servant of all, to give himself in sacrificial service for others. And this concept of love molds the idea of "submit to one another in fear of Christ" in verse 21. Above I noted that this is not about "mutual submission" in the sense that the Christian home Paul is describing here is not a democracy with two individuals compromising and making mutually beneficial decisions, a type of 50-50 arrangement. Rather, Paul describes two individuals giving 100%, the wife submitting to the authority vested in her husband by God, and the husband loving, that is, sacrificing for his wife in accordance with the example of Christ. That such submission, sacrifice, and love is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit present in the lives of husband and wife is apparent from the beginning of the passage where the Holy Spirit is presented as the motive Force behind the submission and love.

Interestingly, Paul continues instruction to the husband in verses 28-32 by reference to love for self. "So husbands should also love their wives as their own bodies." Why this sudden shift of simile? It is to emphasize the intimate nature of the husband and wife relationship. In the Greco-Roman world men were in danger of seeing women as property, something you own and use, perhaps even "use up," but not an equal. Paul demonstrates that such a view is mistaken. Whereas the αγαπή love referred to above has a self-sacrificing aspect, Paul expands the understanding of love here to include a self-preserving and cherishing function. Since the wife is
part of the husband’s own body (cf. Gen 2:24, quoted later in the text, the “two will become one flesh”), his own interests are served by preserving and cherishing her. Again, Christ is the standard, with His cherishing role mentioned with regard to the Church as His body. There is a gentleness in this perspective which helps to balance the courageous self-sacrifice of the love in verses 25-27. It does not contrast with that powerful love, but rather complements it.

In summary, Paul teaches a relationship of mutuality between husband and wife, where the wife submits to the husband and the husband sacrifices himself for the wife. While there are parallels to other authors of the ancient world, Paul’s discussion carries a very clear Christian perspective. The Apostle always places Christ as the pattern for the members of the household. The Christian paradox of loss as gain, finding one’s life by losing it, becomes the paradigm for the Christian home.

Conclusion and Application

This paper began with presuppositions about Scripture and its application to our life today. The incarnational nature of Scripture teaches us important lessons about what God is saying to us today through His Word. This paper is not an exhaustive explanation of the New Testament’s teaching on sexuality, but rather an illustration of central principles of the Christian view of sexuality in the New Testament. We may summarize the principles noted in this paper as follows:

1. Christian marriage is meant to be permanent.
2. Sexual relations are reserved for marriage alone and within marriage husband and wife each have the right to sexual relations with the other.
3. Both Christian marriage and Christian celibacy are within the will of God when entered for the sake of His kingdom.
4. Christians should marry only Christians.
5. In the Christian home each member is called to the Gospel paradox of "loss is gain"—wives are to submit to their husbands, husbands are to sacrificially love their wives.

Interestingly, each of these five principles places a limit upon our life. Living by them is a sign of submission to the will of God and an expression of the power of God within our life. In Paul’s day pagan society’s mores allowed for free sexual expression by men, but not by women. This outlook infected the Christian Church in Corinth and found a ready ally in a dualistic view of human nature and a concomitant eschatology that depreciated the resurrection life in the body.

In some modern societies today there is an interesting parallel. Christian belief in the after life has become common place, but this is most often found in concert with the view that one "goes to heaven" (or to hell) when he or she dies. This is not unlike the Corinthian dualism where the spirit and body could be separated. The belief in immediate departure to heaven or hell at death leads to indifference toward the resurrection of the saints and deemphasis of the Second Coming of our Lord. At the same time, Western societies allow more and more free sexual expression by both men and women. We may illustrate the parallels as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Corinth 1st Century</th>
<th>Western Society 20th Century</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free sexual expression</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of society</td>
<td>Pagan</td>
<td>Christianized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian anthropology</td>
<td>Dualistic</td>
<td>Dualistic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian eschatology</td>
<td>Deemphasis on resurrection</td>
<td>Deemphasis on resurrection</td>
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Although the type of society has changed, the beliefs about human nature and eschatology have strong parallels, as do societal views of sexual expression, though more liberalized in the modern setting.

But if sexuality is so good, such a rich blessing even in a world of sin, why should it be so limited in application? Sexual expression has to be one of the greatest experiences a man or woman can experience. As I tell my students, sex is dynamite. Now, dynamite can be used to open a vein of coal and save much labor, or it can be used to maim and kill hundreds of people. Used safely it is a great benefit, used hatefully it is one of the worst evils. So it is with sex. God’s commands of restriction are meant to protect human beings from the destructive power that sexuality can release if used wrongfully. Thus, the five principles enunciated above are God’s protective restrictions to safeguard us.

But there is another reason for the restrictions. Returning to the dynamite metaphor, dynamite is most powerful when it is placed within a confined area, such as a blasting hole in rock. Its force is much diminished when exploded in the open. So it is with sexual expression. It finds its greatest power and potential within the confines of marriage. In such an exclusive covenantal relationship, a relationship of love, respect, and deep communication, sex is free to explode in joy. The
confines of marriage allow the inherent loss of control of sexual expression to occur in a safe atmosphere of love and respect. In light of these truths and the parallels between Paul's society and our own, the Apostle's counsel in 1 Cor 6-7 appears more applicable today than ever before.

This viewpoint is bolstered by the impressive list of Christian doctrines used to support or explain the principles listed above. The list of doctrines includes the unity of man, the unity of the Trinity, the unity of the Church with Christ, the resurrection and future Kingdom of God, the unity of Christian marriage, and the sacrificial love of Christ in salvation. It is truly amazing how many central doctrines of Christian faith are linked to these principles regarding sexuality. This points to the importance of the principles regarding sexual expression and their abiding nature. If the many supporting doctrines continue to be valid, as they do, it would seem logical to expect their practical outworking in Christian moral life to continue as well. The application of these principles today in Christian living seems particularly fitting in the light of moral degeneracy and high divorce rates in Western society.

The concepts of submission and sacrificial love appear unacceptable to many in an age that asks, "what is in it for me?" However, these very principles open the marriage partners to the experience of the Gospel paradox ("loss as gain") and allow Christ to work out His grace in the daily home life. Where submission and love combine in the Christian home the rich power of Christianity finds a stable and lasting expression which stands as a beacon in a world where selfishness rules, commitment is deemed a prison, and lust masquerades as love.

How may these concepts be applied with the Adventist Church today? Following are a few recommendations:

1. **The youth of the Church deserve careful Christ-filled mentoring and instruction by parents, educators, and Church members.** While the media and teen culture promulgate a free sex, no responsibility set of values, the strongest influence in a child's life can still be a loving parent who models high Christian principles.

2. **Sermons on the Christian home ought to present the deep theology and hold up the high calling the New Testament presents on the Christian home.** Too often the rich theology of sexuality is not expressed in teaching on this subject and people only hear the commands without the rich supporting doctrines. The ringing denunciations of sexual immorality should be heard, but in conjunction with the theology the Apostle Paul and others use to support. Love speaks the truth with grace and applies it to the heart.

3. **Married couples and their families deserve instruction in the meaning of Christian marriage.** Societal influences are set strongly toward the disintegration of families. We cannot expect people to model the Christian paradox of "loss is gain" if we do not repeat and explain the lesson over and over. This may be accomplished through sermons, Sabbath School instruction, premarital counseling, family support groups, etc. The message should be given clearly.

4. **Perhaps some symbol of marriage commitment and family stability should be developed.** We already symbolize this in special anniversary celebrations, but these are not common enough to impress the high value of commitment. Rather than one symbol, perhaps a number of symbolic actions could be developed and suggested to congregations as possible ways to illustrate the high value of commitment and family stability.

The Christian message about sexuality is clear and distinctive. While the world moves toward greater promiscuity and family disunity, the Christian message stands for chastity, fidelity, stability, submission, and sacrificial love. The importance of this message is well illustrated by the central doctrines of Christian theology that surround it and explain it. While times have changed since our Lord walked this earth and Paul preached in Corinth, the need for their message of fidelity and purity is needed as much today as then. We do well to give this message clearly -- "Glorify God in your body."