

Dean's Letter, 20 August 2017

Dear Cathedral family

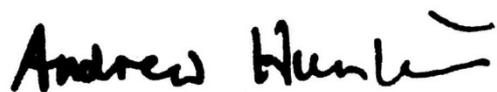
Today is the final sermon in the series on 1 Corinthians. The sermon topic is an interesting one: Permissible but not beneficial: appropriate sexual behaviour. Other possible titles could be The holy people of God or Personal holiness in our relationships with others. In these days (are they much different from others?) of free and easy relationships, a great deal of personal freedom and individual choice, are "old-fashioned" rules and boundaries relevant? Appropriate? Necessary? Does it matter what people do in their personal lives? Is it anyone's business?

Most parents or grandparents would, I think, have quite clear boundaries and rules to guide the behaviour of their children and teenagers. But when young people leave home, go to university, or move out on their own, there is a great deal of freedom and room for personal choices. "No sex before marriage" or "no sex outside of marriage" is the standard and traditional Christian teaching, in most communities. Quite challenging, as the age at which people get married is rising; some choose to have a child, but not to get married; some are happy to be in a long-term relationship but not to get married; boy-friends and girl-friends are in relationship and sleeping together, but not married; many couples live together before marriage, or have little or no intention of getting married. Relationships don't work out, partners walk away, leaving the child behind. All these are realities in our families, in our communities, and in the church. I ask the question I have asked before, in acknowledging the diversity of families and relationships: is this diversity a sign of freedom and empowerment and personal choice? Or signs and the consequences of sin, leading to brokenness, pain and destruction?

While we would like a clear, unambiguous answer that fits all circumstances, I don't think it is always as simple as that. Pastoral realities, pain and heartache make us rethink our understanding and approach to this wonderful and so complex part of our lives: our relationships, and appropriate behaviour.

I would want for our young people, as far as possible, to refrain from sexual intercourse outside of marriage; I would want relationships between people of the opposite sex not to progress into sleeping together; sexual intercourse should be reserved for marriage. Couples should not be living together outside of marriage, or before marriage. If they want to move in together, then why not get married? And if they are not ready for marriage, then live apart! Boundaries help to give guidance; they can also help to protect people from abusive and manipulative behaviour. Boundaries and guidelines serve to protect the powerless against the powerful, and help us as the people of God to remain holy.

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.