

NEWSLETTER

EDITORIAL: SEXUALITY AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The NSW & ACT Baptist annual assembly is coming up this month. At this assembly the churches will be discussing the matter of sexuality and church leadership. I think that it is fair to say that this issue has arisen because of the move in other denominations towards the appointment of practising homosexuals to leadership in churches. But as evangelicals we recognise that this issue is broader than this question alone.

On the one hand, it

raises the question of what the big picture of the Bible is on human sexuality; on the other hand, it relates to all serious moral and ethical misconduct by those in pastoral leadership, and how we address it as a union of churches.

Five churches have brought this matter again to our assembly concerned that this issue has not been addressed sufficiently by our churches. In this newsletter we want to understand the concerns that have been raised and work through what

the implication of these motions might be for us as evangelicals.

This special edition of our BET newsletter will be given over to this issue. In it we are going to talk to three of the pastors responsible for the framing of the motions that will be debated by assembly.

Tony Prestoe is the pastor of Castle Hill Baptist church and many of us will already be acquainted with him through his association with BET over many years. The other two

you might not know. Philip Calman is the pastor at Chatswood Baptist church where he has served for the last eleven years and David Starling has been the pastor at Petersham Baptist since 2000.

We hope that by talking to these three pastors that our membership might be better prepared for the upcoming assembly.

Steven Grose (Editor)

Editor: Is this discussion at assembly really necessary? Didn't we discuss this at 1999 assembly? Why bring it up all over again?



Tony Prestoe
Castle Hill Church

I think that it is important for a number of reasons. The controversial decisions and actions of liberal churches have put this issue very much on the agenda and it is incumbent on Baptists of NSW & ACT to state their position clearly.

In the secular world the push towards 'same-sex' marriage grows stronger every day though the

Australian Marriage Act still expresses the fundamental Judeo-Christian view and that is that marriage is a life long union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others.

However, the situation on the world scene indicates that governments in other countries have moved radically away from this definition and there are those in our

community who would like to see Australia follow suit. I think, therefore, that it is necessary for biblical Christians to declare their convictions concerning the nature of marriage so that our society knows where we stand as Baptists of NSW & ACT and also so that our pastors and churches might be encouraged and strengthened by us making that affirmation.

(Continued on page 2)

**“Our society
needs to know
where we stand
as Baptists of
NSW & ACT”**



**David Starling
Petersham Church**

(Continued from page 1)

Most of those who take note of the church scene today would be aware that a large number of churches (and denominations) are ambivalent about these issues and many are now willing to accept and bless other kinds of relationships and behaviours than those described as biblically acceptable.

I firmly believe that these variant approaches contradict the biblical principle that Genesis 2 & 3 makes quite clear that marriage was intended to be a faithful, exclusive, life time relationship between a man and a woman and that the only legitimate place for sexual union is within that relationship. Jesus

endorses that divine principle of marriage in Matthew 19:4-6

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

These first two chapters in Genesis teach the God ordained nature and purpose of marriage and if we take the biblical record seriously then we must affirm, uphold and enunciate these principles whenever and wherever that is neces-

sary.

Although we wholeheartedly endorse the Statement of the June 1999 Assembly on Human Sexuality, Marriage and Church Leadership we also believe that it is now necessary to be more particular in what we say about human sexuality and the effects and implications of wrongful sexual relationships with respect to Church Leadership and Church Affiliation in the Union. Motions 3 and 4 are designed to do just that.

Editor: What sort of message will these motions give to homosexual people in our community and in our churches? Aren’t we called to love this group of people?

I hope that the message these motions give to homosexual people in our community and churches is something like this...

■ When Jesus calls us to follow him, he promises us complete forgiveness and calls us to radical and costly changes in how we live. The relationship with God that Jesus offers is worth more than anything else in all the world - whatever we need to give up to follow Jesus, it is worth it!

■ Jesus’ teaching and example in the gospels makes it very clear that no-one is beyond the grace of God, and no-one remains unchanged when they come to Jesus.

■ The Bible never singles out homosexual sin as being any more or less serious than any other sexual sin; the motions that we are bringing to assembly are not motions about sexual orientation or homosexuality but about all sexual activity outside marriage, without distinction.

■ One of the reasons why sexual sin is so frequently spoken of in the Bible is because it is so destructive of human personhood and relationships (cf. 1 Cor 6:18). To urge a brother or sister who is caught up in sexual sin to repent is exactly what love calls us to do, and to fail to do so is profoundly unloving.

In summary, I hope that the message our motions convey is both loving and truthful, and faithful to the message of the Bible.

Editor: What about the Baptist principle of ‘freedom of conscience’? Some might argue that these motions shackle the consciences of people and undermine this important Baptist principle.

Freedom of conscience is an important Baptist principle. Early Baptists in England gave expression to this idea in the 17th century. For them it meant the liberty to hold views contrary to the established church without fear of persecution by the state. In 17th century England a number of the first Baptists were imprisoned for their faith and a number were even martyred. The authority of the church and the crown were intertwined with one another and as a consequence to reject the beliefs and structures of the Church of England brought with it punishment by the crown. Baptists have rightly championed freedom of conscience in society.

The motions that are being proposed do not in anyway take away this liberty or freedom of conscience. Churches and

the individuals in them are free to follow their own consciences on these matters and act accordingly. But there are times when the decisions that we make and the direction that we choose for ourselves also mean that we part company with others. These motions on sexuality and leadership make it clear that this issue is a point at which a church will part company with the association.

As Baptists we uphold liberty of conscience. But this doesn’t mean that we ought to be frightened to define ourselves as an association. There must be a basis on which we work together otherwise we will end up fragmenting. If you argue that freedom of conscience means that so long as churches hold beliefs in ‘good conscience’ they can believe what-

ever they want to believe then ultimately you will end up with no common ground on which cooperation can be based. This is to misunderstand and misapply the whole notion of religious liberty.

These motions on sexuality and leadership work out of a belief that our basis of cooperation as Baptists is a common commitment to Biblical authority. To maintain this belief requires us as an association to make judgments. It is not enough just to say we uphold the truth of Scripture, we also have to make judgments together on what we believe are clear Bible principles. If we aren’t prepared to do this as group of churches then the authority of Scripture really means nothing to us as union.



Philip Calman
Chatswood Church

“There are times when the decisions that we make and the direction that we choose for ourselves also mean that we part company with others”

Editor: Why single out this issue? What about the greedy person or the liar?

This is a good question and an important one.

The following points should be made...

■ The motions we are moving deliberately don’t single out sexual sin as the only reason why a person would be prohibited from positions of pastoral leadership in our denomination. Sexual sin is spoken of in the motions as being merely one example among oth-

ers of what ‘serious moral or ethical conduct’ might constitute for the purposes of discreditation. Within the motions we are proposing, it is entirely realistic to envisage the possibility of someone being discredited for greed or lying, where those sins were engaged in manifestly, flagrantly and without contrition (for example in a case of theft or fraud).

■ Nevertheless, there is something about sexual sin that the NT writers do see as being particularly destructive in its consequences, and it is no accident that the paradigm case for church discipline in 1 Cor 5 is one of unrepentant sexual sin. To specifically make mention of this sin (which many in our society no longer see as sin) is not to deny the seriousness of other sins, but simply to make clear our position on this one.



David Starling
Petersham Church



David Starling

We should not be afraid to act out of genuine concern for the whole family of believers and for our corporate holiness.

Editor: What about unity? Ought we not be more concerned to maintain unity as churches?

It is right to cherish the unity that we have with our brothers and sisters in Jesus. The very same Scriptures that denounce 'sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery' go on in the next line to denounce 'selfish ambition, dissensions and factions' (Gal 5:19-20).

But the unity that the Scriptures teach us to value is not the unity of denominations and structures, but the unity of the Spirit - a unity that consists in a common relationship with God as Father and Jesus as Lord, a common devotion to the gospel and a common submission to the Scriptures. Where these are absent, the only 'unity' there can be is the unity of an unequal yoke.

In an issue like the one under discussion, we do need to be careful not to do anything that is driven by motives of factionalism and divisiveness. We need to guard against any

desire to advance the cause of one 'faction' within the family of believers against another.

But at the same time we should not be afraid to act out of a genuine concern for the welfare of the whole family of believers and for our corporate holiness. It is precisely because we are one lump of dough, and a little yeast works through the whole batch (1 Cor 5:6) that we need to take issues of corporate holiness and church discipline seriously.

The same letter in which Paul makes it very clear that there are disputable matters and secondary issues in which one person's conscience is not to be the judge of another's (1 Cor 8-10) is also the letter in which Paul insists that there are other matters, including unrepentant sexual sin, in which there is no room for doubting what the will of God is (1 Cor 5-6).

In these matters, silently condoning the sin of someone who calls himself a brother and yet will not repent is unloving, destructive and dangerous.

Obviously, the original context Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians was not a denomination but a local congregation, but if our denominational fellowship is anything more than merely a convenient business relationship, then we still need to take seriously the responsibilities that come from being in association with one another.

I think Baptists in NSW are very committed to both the unity and the holiness of our denomination, and while I anticipate healthy discussion at assembly about the details of the motions, I doubt that there will be any serious division over the broad thrust and intention of what we are proposing.

Editor: What will happen to the property of churches that are removed from affiliation?

The short answer is the same thing that happens now. As our by-laws presently stand an assembly can remove a church from affiliation. It is my understanding that there have been a number of churches over the years that have been removed from affiliation and the property issues have been worked out through negotiation with the church concerned and the full time officers and execu-

tive council on behalf of the union.

We would assume that in the future the same process of negotiation would be repeated if a church were removed from affiliation on these grounds or on any other grounds. All that these motions do is make clear that to knowingly appoint or retain a person in pastoral leadership who is engaging in sexual

activity outside of marriage is ground for disaffiliation.

The other thing that I think ought to be said is that the basis of the union ought not be the property trust act. It ought not be the thing that binds us together as churches and it ought not be used as such. We ought not maintain a union merely because of the

(Continued on page 5)



Philip Calman

(Continued from page 4)

perceived loss of property if a church were to leave. On the other hand

as a church we ought not remain in a union if we have for all intents and purposes parted company

with it, no longer holding the common held beliefs, which are the basis of our associational life.

Editor: Aren't our existing by-laws sufficient for the Executive Committee to deal with this situation?

In my opinion the by-laws as they presently stand are sufficient in the power that they give to Executive Committee but insufficient in the clarity with which they define the principles that should guide the Executive in exercising that power. Let me explain what I mean.

I say they are sufficient because if an executive committee decides that it wants to act and bring a recommendation to assembly to disaffiliate a church it can. They are however inadequate because they don't say that the Executive Committee has to act and nor do they define what we mean by Biblical principles. Our present system leaves the decision completely with the Executive Committee and it then also has to determine how to act in accordance with Biblical principles.

The question one might ask is what are the Biblical principles that will govern the course of their actions? What one person might argue is according to Biblical principles is often denied by another. For instance I am sure that when the Victoria Baptist Union came to their conclusion that Baptist churches could appoint whoever they liked as pastors including practising homo-

sexuals they thought that they were acting according to Biblical principles. I am also sure that when the leadership within the Uniting Church came to a similar decision that they too thought that they were acting according to Biblical principles. Now I would strongly disagree with this view, but I don't raise it to be disagreeable but rather to highlight the fact that to some extent everybody argues what they are doing is according to Biblical principles.

In my opinion it is not sufficient to just mandate the Executive committee to act in accordance with Biblical principles. It is necessary for us as group to clearly define together what we understand those Biblical principles are with regards to sexuality and leadership in our churches. We then secondly need to stipulate the course of action that will be taken if those principles are discarded. The best place to do this is in our by-laws.

By defining this in the by-laws the Executive committee will be protected and empowered. I have no doubt that our current Executive would act in a godly and a Biblical way. But on what grounds could they argue that their understanding of the issue was how we all saw it as an association? How would they defend themselves if

the outside media got involved? Wouldn't it appear to the outsider that we were just making up our rules of association as we went along?

More than this, the by-laws also have an important role in helping our churches understand the terms of our association together as a union. They spell out how we are going to operate together as group of churches. It is not enough to just provide the mechanism for disaffiliating a church in the by-laws we also ought to provide clear grounds as to why a church can be disaffiliated. The rules of our association ought to be explicit so that churches can understand the Biblical principles that we hold in common and how these principles are going to be applied.

Churches need to be aware of the consequences of deviating from what we believe to be Biblical. They also need to know this before they embark on a course of action rather than waiting until after that action has been taken to find out what the consequences will be. In my opinion we ought to make everything plain and transparent now.



Philip Calman

“It is not enough to just provide the mechanism for disaffiliating a church in the by-laws we also ought to provide clear grounds as to why a church can be disaffiliated.”

Sexuality and Church Leadership

Motions for Annual Assembly

Motion 1. An affirmation of our beliefs about human sexuality and marriage

That the Baptist churches of NSW & ACT affirm the following statement on human sexuality and marriage:

God created people male and female and together they were created in the image of God. Men and women were created equal to but different from one another. Marriage is a covenant relationship ordained by God between two people of the opposite sex. Sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and woman is immoral and counter to God's intention for us as people.

Motion 2. Recording and publishing of Assembly affirmations

That the Baptist Churches of NSW and the ACT require that this and other similar Assembly Affirmations made from time to time be placed on permanent record for easy access by all churches and by members of the general public. (Including a permanent record of such affirmations on the Union Website.)

Motion 3. That 'By-law 17 ACCREDITATION OF MINISTERS' be amended to reflect the decision of the 1999 Assembly on Human sexuality, marriage and church leadership.

3.1 Include a third point under "A. Acceptance for Accreditation for Ministry"

The third point will read as the 1999 assembly resolved:

"The Baptist Union of NSW will not knowingly accredit, for ordination or any other ministry, persons who engage in sexual relationships outside the marriage relationship of a man and woman. Applications for accreditation or ordination or any other ministry from persons involved in sexual relationship outside of marriage will be declined."

3.2 Create a new point c.3.e under By-Law 17 which reads as follows:

e) If (i) they no longer subscribe to the doctrinal basis of the union or (ii) they are engaging in serious moral or ethical misconduct. Serious moral or ethical misconduct includes, but is not limited to, sexual activity outside of a legally recognized marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Such a determination shall be made by a resolution of the assembly in accordance with the provision of sub-paragraph (f) below.

3.3 Renumber what was formerly c.3.e to become c.3.f.

Motion 4. That ‘By-Law 18 ADMISSION OF CHURCHES’ be amended to include the appointment or retention of a person in pastoral leadership who is engaging in sexual activity outside of a legally recognized marriage relationship between a man and a woman as a ground for disaffiliating a church.

4.1 Change the name of By-Law 18 from “ADMISSION OF CHURCHES” to “ADMISSION AND DISAFFILIATION OF CHURCHES”

4.2 Create a new point under By-Law 18 entitled ‘B. Disaffiliation’

4.3 Move what was formerly point number 3 under ‘A. Admission’ and make it point number 1 under ‘B. Disaffiliation’

4.4 Create a second point under ‘B. Disaffiliation’ that reads as follows:

Where the Executive Committee becomes aware that a church affiliated with the Union may have a person in pastoral leadership who is engaging in sexual activity with another person outside of a legally recognised marriage relationship between a man and a woman, the Executive Committee (or an appointed sub-committee) shall investigate the matter in consultation with the pastor concerned and then if necessary with the leadership of the church.

If after such investigation the Executive Committee is satisfied (1) that the person in pastoral leadership is engaging in sexual activity with another person outside of a legally recognised marriage relationship between a man and woman and (2) that the intention of the church is to retain the person in a position of pastoral leadership, the Executive Committee shall notify the church that if the person is not removed from pastoral leadership within three months of having been given such notification, the Executive Committee is required to bring a resolution to the next possible Assembly that the church be disaffiliated. The notification shall be given to the church by pre-paid letter sent through the post to the Secretary of the Church at the last known place of abode.

If the church within three months of having received such notification has not removed the person from his or her position of pastoral leadership and if the person is continuing to engage in sexual activity with another person outside of a legally recognised marriage relationship between a man and a woman, then the Executive Committee shall bring a resolution to the next possible Assembly that the church be disaffiliated. An Assembly may pass such a resolution provided it conforms to the conditions of sub-paragraph 1 above.

4.5 Re-number 18 A 4 to 18 A 3

Baptist Evangelicals Today

Baptist Evangelicals Today
P.O. Box 1765,
Castle Hill, NSW 1765.

Make sure
that you
are there at
Annual
Assembly
especially
for the
Friday
afternoon
session.

Baptist Evangelicals Today

Baptist Evangelicals Today (BET) is an network of evangelical Baptists working together to promote Bible based, gospel ministry within the Baptists churches of NSW and ACT by (1) defending the truth of the gospel and (2) growing the ministry of the gospel within our churches.

BET endeavours to defend the truth of the gospel through maintaining an open dialogue within our union of churches on gospel issues. BET will resist the movement to relativise Biblical discussion by endeavouring to promote thoughtful and helpful Biblical thinking on issues through godly dialogue within the various structures of the union. Members will be encouraged to engage in a godly way in the dialogue of our assembly on matters that impinge on a Biblical view of the gospel.

BET secondly endeavours to encourage the growth of gospel ministry within NSW and ACT by working together to support and equip gospel workers within our network of churches for the advancement of the gospel.

BET exists to promote and maintain the gospel of Jesus as our primary basis of union and fellowship as Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT. The existence of BET is not a criticism or a rejection of the central organization of the Union. We believe however that for our union to remain healthy and for the gospel to spread and bear fruit that people need to work together wherever possible to maintain the truth of the gospel and promote gospel ministry.

Further Reading

The list below is briefly list of evangelical response to the attempts that have been made in recent decades to redefine a Biblical understanding of sexuality:

John Stott, "Issues Facing Christians Today"

Thomas Schmidt, "Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual debate"; (Leicester: IVP, 1995).

Barry Webb, "Homosexuality in Scripture, in Theological and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality, (Adelaide: Open Book. 1994); 65-103

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY DETAILS

This year's annual assembly will be held at Parkside Baptist Church from Thursday 16 September to Saturday 18 September. Two times have been set aside for the purpose of a special general meeting: 2 pm on Friday September 17 and 11 am Saturday September 18. Please plan to attend on both these days. The motions will definitely be discussed on the afternoon session on Friday and if accepted the by-law changes will mostly like be confirmed on the Saturday.

**Parkside
Baptist Church
717 Smithfield
Rd,
Edensor Park**