

Human Sexuality

In a time when views of human sexuality and marriage are rapidly changing, we believe it is necessary and helpful to state clearly and compassionately to the church and the world our beliefs about God's design for human sexuality. We wish to do so with love toward all as we attempt to imitate God's love for us.¹ We long for the Church as well as society to conform to biblical standards of sexuality; but our ultimate desire is that, through the gospel, all may come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives and receive His gift of eternal life. We also know that, having come to believe in Him, we enjoy His blessing by walking with Him according to His Word. We believe the Bible to be God's Word and that to understand and obey His will leads to the greatest human flourishing.² What follows is what we believe the Scriptures teach and the Christian Church has held to be true since the time of the apostles, and what therefore holds the greatest prospects for human happiness and well-being, even as we strive and long for a time when God will make all things new.³

The Divine Origin and Purpose of Human Sexuality

Human sexuality is a gift from God. The Scriptures present a grand vision of husband and wife who are to have intimate fellowship through union with a covenant partner who is both similar (human) and different (opposite sex) leading to fruitful procreation of humanity. In this profound mystery, we discover God's purposes for our sexuality and how He wills it to be expressed in our union and communion with Him.⁴

The fall of humankind, recorded in Genesis 3, corrupted our natures, and this corrupted nature made us utterly indisposed, disabled, opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.⁵ We began to distort and misuse the gifts of God to our own demise and entered into the conditions of sin and misery. All of our sinful transgressions emerge from this corrupted nature, and this corruption of our hearts, along with all its impulses, is itself sin.⁶ The fall also broke our world and everything in it, including our relationships, bodies, and affections, such that we suffer by facing many temptations to sin.⁷

Therefore, because God made us and redeems us, He alone has sovereign authority to define us and to regulate the right ordering of our desires and our sexual practice, and empowers us to align with His good will.

Our Father does this through the gracious redemptive work of His Son, Jesus Christ, and

¹ 1 John 4:10; John 15:12; 1 John 3:10; Ephesians 5:1-2

² Psalm 1; Matthew 4:4

³ Revelation 21:5

⁴ Genesis 2:18-25; Song of Songs; Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

⁵ Genesis 6:5; 8:21; John 3:6; Romans 3:10-19; 5:6; 7:18; 8:7; Colossians 1:21; Westminster Confession of Faith 6.3-4; Westminster Larger Catechism 28

⁶ Matthew 15:19; Ephesians 2:2-3; James 1:14; Westminster Confession of Faith 6.4-5

⁷ Westminster Confession of Faith 6.6; Westminster Larger Catechism 23; 27-28.

the provision of His Holy Spirit, by which He leads us from brokenness and rebellion to a full and beautiful restoration of our relationship with Him and of our human dignity and purpose.⁸ In our union with Christ, our transgressions are pardoned, our corrupted nature is being mortified, and we are enabled by His Spirit to recognize and confess our sins, repent, mortify sin, and flee temptation.⁹ We enjoy now a taste of the consummation for God's purpose: the experience of union and communion with God through the redemption of Jesus and indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the children of the Father. This present inbreaking of the kingdom of God means that the restoration from our condition of sin includes not only an affirmation of marriage and sex, but also the validation of the single life. Redeemed sexuality is grounded in God's good creation and looks forward to its eschatological consummation.

Until Christ returns, the corrupt nature remains in the regenerate during this life and while pardoned, the corruption itself and all motions proceeding from it remain truly and properly sin. We, therefore, must continually repent of our sin, resist every temptation, and renounce every attempt to subvert God's purposes and His commandments concerning our sexuality. We must repent of our corrupted hearts, sinful lusts, and indulging temptation. We have been made alive in Christ by His Spirit, and must keep in step with Him in order to mortify the passions of the flesh. We acknowledge that any sexual desires apart from God's design for marriage are sinful, arise from our sinfully corrupted nature, and we must repent of them all. We also acknowledge that any temptations to fulfill sexual desire apart from God's design for marriage must be resisted, regardless of how persistent or seemingly innate the temptation or desire is.

Confession of Sin

We, as evangelical Presbyterians, readily and sorrowfully confess our manifold violations of His Word: as a people, we have engaged in premarital sex, adultery, ungodly divorce, and sexual lusts of every sort, not only before coming to faith in Christ, but also afterward. As churches, we have at times sanctioned unbiblical marriages, violating the expressed will of God revealed in the Scriptures; and we sometimes have self-righteously condemned others for their sexual sins while committing our own. We stand in need of God's forgiveness and power to live holy lives. Our churches desperately need revival and a humble return to godly sexual practice. And so, with humble and repentant hearts, we return to the Lord, and we invite those both inside and outside the Church to join us in seeking God's blessing in our sexual lives.¹⁰

We believe that the fundamental problems with most contemporary views of sexuality are, first, that the focus is limited to individual pleasure, relational intimacy, and self-fulfillment; and, second, that biblical marriage is rejected as the exclusive context for sexual intimacy. While the Scriptures teach that human sexuality is indeed a gift for our

⁸ John 10:10; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-8

⁹ Psalm 1; Matthew 4:4

¹⁰ Psalm 85:4-7; Matthew 7:4-5; Acts 3:19-20

enjoyment, its primary purpose is to glorify God.¹¹ Whether young or old, male or female, single or married, all humans are obligated to glorify our Creator in our sexuality through faithful conformity to God's design, revealed in the Scriptures.

We desire to adhere fully to biblical sexuality. Out of love we remind ourselves and share with others the message of God's judgment upon all forms of sexual immorality.¹² We also believe that there is no place for any form of cruelty, hate or denigration of those who either disagree with these positions or hold to other positions. We unequivocally condemn all injustices, sinful intimidation, and physical violence perpetrated against anyone because of sexual attraction or practice.

The Single Life

The New Testament commends the single life.¹³ As followers of Jesus, we are bound in spiritual union with Him as Bridegroom, in Whom we are to be complete and content.¹⁴ By expressing our maleness or femaleness, even apart from romantic relationships, we enrich human community and contribute to the well-being of society. Single men and women are also given the opportunity to serve the Lord with undivided devotion. They are free, in a particular way, to dedicate their entire lives to the Lord and find their greatest fulfillment in pleasing Him. This was true for our Lord Jesus and for the Apostle Paul, who exemplified and elevated the godly single life. God intends both married and single men and women to live in vibrant community together, rather than isolation and loneliness. In this sacred community of deep and committed friendships, we encourage single persons to live out loving, holy, celibate lives. We, in the EPC, encourage all of our churches to nurture holy and missional community among and with single members.

The Married Life

When God created us male and female, He also instituted the ordinance of marriage in which one man and one woman are bound together for life in a solemn covenant, which beautifully illustrates God's covenantal relationship with His chosen people.¹⁵ God's design for marriage and sex in creation is affirmed by Christ. God directs His people who marry to wed only fellow believers—those who trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and have joined His Church.¹⁶ It is within the covenant of marriage alone that God—for His own glory, the mutual encouragement of the spouses, procreation, the strengthening of the family, and the welfare of humankind—has instructed husbands and wives to engage in regular, intimate sexual love.¹⁷ In this uniquely sexual relationship, the married couple seeks to remember, celebrate, and model Christ's love for His Church

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:31; Philippians 1:20

¹² 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 4:17; Revelation 21:8; 22:15

¹³ 1 Corinthians 7:8, 32-35

¹⁴ John 15:5; Ephesians 5:25, 32; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

¹⁵ Genesis 2:23-25; Isaiah 61:10-62:5; Matthew 19:3-12

¹⁶ Malachi 2:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14

¹⁷ Proverbs 5:18-21; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

and His Church's devotion to her Lord and to serve one another with godly affection.¹⁸

A Call to Holiness

We believe God has called us to live holy lives.¹⁹ The Christian believer's body is a temple of God's Spirit;²⁰ therefore rather than stealing sexual privileges from one another outside of marriage, we are called to edify one another in multiple ways that we may all become more like Christ. Those who are married must avoid every temptation that would diminish the loving faithfulness they vowed in their marriage covenant. Those who are unmarried must seek to honor God through diligently avoiding temptation, restraining ungodly sexual impulses, focusing their energies on serving Christ and neighbor, and eagerly anticipating the new heavens and the new earth, when all things will be restored and every godly human longing beautifully fulfilled.²¹ Those who find themselves desiring to be a person of the opposite sex or gender face painful emotions and weighty consequences. With heartfelt sympathy and a deep desire to love and encourage them in their circumstances, we believe all people must find their contentment in Christ alone, accepting His wise and gracious providence, and looking to Him for strength to glorify Him and to serve his or her neighbor through the sex given at conception.²²

It is encouraging to remember that our Lord Jesus suffered every human temptation without sinning.²³ Extended seasons of bodily weakness and sexual temptation may weaken our sense of God's grace and assurance of salvation, yet God's Spirit never abandons his children, and our Father always provides His people a way of escape from every sin.²⁴ Unrepentant sinful behavior is incompatible with the confession of Jesus as Lord required of all members of the EPC. Additionally, it is required of ordained officers in the EPC that they believe, practice, and teach the moral standards contained in the Scriptures and Constitution of the EPC and reflected in this position paper.

Recovering from Sexual Brokenness

Because of universal human corruption emanating from the fall of Adam and Eve, we are all broken sexually in one or more ways and to varying degrees.²⁵ We have all sinned and we all live in a world full of sin and temptation. We have been saved by the sheer grace of God in Christ. Therefore, while we call upon fellow sinners everywhere to repent of their

¹⁸ Ephesians 5:25-33

¹⁹ Hebrews 12:14; Ephesians 5:3-5

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

²¹ Psalm 16:11; Revelation 19:6-9

²² We understand that in rare cases, physiological gender ambiguity at birth calls for special care and wisdom.

²³ Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15-16

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 2:12-13; Westminster Larger Catechism 81

²⁵ Romans 3:22b-23

sins,²⁶ we must do so in a spirit of gentleness²⁷, acknowledging it is right and good for us to live in continual personal and corporate repentance, humbly seeking God's help for ourselves and for our neighbor.²⁸ Through faith in the crucified and resurrected Jesus, we are forgiven all our sexual sins, washed from their impurity, and given the power of the Holy Spirit to live lives worthy of the gospel, setting an example for the watching world and inviting them to join us in walking with Jesus.²⁹

Those in and out of the Church struggling with various forms of sexual disorientation or gender dysphoria should experience from God's people a deep desire to identify with them in their struggles, to walk lovingly with them, and to invite them to join us in following the Lord. Together as a people, we must all seek healing for our own lives and for each other's lives, discovering what it means to be godly men and women in the circumstances decreed by His providence. Glorifying God in our sexual lives will at times entail suffering or persecution of various sorts, but, by God's empowering grace, we aspire to obey Him with joy.³⁰

The Ministry of the Church

The Church belongs to God.³¹ He called us out of the dominion of darkness with its sin and degradation into the glorious light of His love.³² He has called us to reflect His glory by displaying His character and proclaiming His Word to ourselves and the world. As repentant and forgiven sinners, we in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church resolve to teach the biblical truths of godly sexuality to our members and to all who will listen, with compassion and with courage, regardless of the cost to ourselves. To do otherwise would be a failure of love. We will strive by God's grace to discipline our personal lives and our local churches in accordance with God's Word. God helping us, we shall continue, within our churches and in the public arena, to teach against and to refuse to condone or participate in any sinful form of sexual practice³³—including sexual abuse,³⁴ pornography,³⁵ sexual lust,³⁶ extra-marital sex,³⁷ adultery,³⁸

²⁶ Acts 17:30

²⁷ Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 2:1; Galatians 6:1-2

²⁸ 2 Corinthians 7:10

²⁹ Romans 8:1ff.; 1 Peter 2:9-12

³⁰ Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; James 1:2-4

³¹ 1 Peter 1:18-19; Ephesians 5:25; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

³² Colossians 1:13; John 12:46, 1 Peter 2:9-10

³³ Romans 13:13, 14; Ephesians 5:3

³⁴ Deuteronomy 22:25-27; Ephesians 5:28-31

³⁵ Matthew 5:27-30; Romans 8:5-13; Ephesians 2:3

³⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5; Colossians 3:5

³⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:6

³⁸ Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:20; Deuteronomy 22:22; Proverbs 6:32; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9

polygamy,³⁹ unbiblical divorce and remarriage,⁴⁰ homosexual conduct,⁴¹ same-sex union and marriage,⁴² and gender reassignment.⁴³ At the same time, we resolve to continue to love those who have committed these sins and/or suffered from them. And we shall wait with eager longing for the day of our Savior's return, when all shall be made right with us and the world. In the name of Jesus, our compassionate Savior, we tenderly welcome all—regardless of their beliefs or lifestyles—to attend our churches. Further, we invite into the membership of our churches all those who—bruised and broken by the fall—seek now, through sincere faith and genuine repentance, to live in obedience to the Scriptures and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

To God's Name be glory forever.

³⁹ Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4, 5; 1 Timothy 3:2

⁴⁰ Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14.

For more, see the EPC "Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage."

⁴¹ Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 7

⁴² Matthew 5:13-16; Romans 1:32; 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:14

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Galatians 5:19-23; Philippians 4:11-13