

Context

Never have the sexual ethics of our culture been more confused and contorted. Divorce is rampant; co-habitation before or instead of marriage has become normal; new technologies have made pornography immediately accessible; and the once inconceivable notion of same sex "marriage" is now recognized by law in a growing number of jurisdictions. The need for a clear voice from the church on these matters is critical, both for the health of our own community and for our faithful witness to the world. This Statement, drawn from Scripture as our ultimate authority, sets forth a Christian vision of human sexuality as a good gift of God. The divine design for sexual expression within the commitment of marriage between a man and a woman is fundamental to the well-ordering of human society and is integral to human flourishing. We desire to articulate this ethic as moral truth binding on us all while recognizing our need of God's grace and forgiveness in the ways that we all fall short of this divine ideal.

Affirmations

We affirm the following:

- Our views of this issue flow from our commitment to God (Dt. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-38) and to His Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Dt.32:45-47; Matt. 4:4), as expressed in the first two articles of our Statement of Faith
- God created human beings as male and female (Gen. 1:27). The complementary, relational nature of the human race as "male and female" reflects the created order given by God when He created human beings "in His image" (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1, 3; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jms. 3:9; cf. Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:10). It is with joy in our finitude that we are to receive the gift of being either male or female.
- Scripture grants two life-enhancing options for sexual behavior: monogamous marital relations between one man and one woman (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18, 21-24; Matt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:5-8; cf. Heb. 13:4) or sexual celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7; Matt. 19:12). Either is a gift from God, given as He wills for His glory and the good of those who receive and rejoice in His gift to them.
- In Scripture monogamous heterosexual marriage bears a significance which goes beyond the regulation of sexual behavior, the bearing and raising of children, the formation of families, and the recognition of certain economic and legal rights, all of which are important. Marriage between a woman and a man is emphatically declared in Scripture to create a "one flesh" union (Gen. 2:23-24; Matt. 19:5), which in turn signifies the mystery of the union between Christ and His body, the Church (Eph. 5:22-33). This means that the foundational understanding of marriage is as a covenant grounded in promises between a man and a woman which finds its divinely intended expression in the "one flesh" union of husband and wife, and between the "one flesh" union of husband and wife and God (cf. Prov. 2:16-17; Mal. 2:14; Eph. 5:31-32). Given this understanding we cannot condone sexual relations and co-habitation outside of marriage as scripture defines this as sin. For those who are struggling in this area we would counsel them as Paul did (1 Cor. 7:36, 1 Thes 4:3, Col 3:5).
- All of human existence, including our sexuality, has been deeply damaged by the fall into sin (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23; 5:12). We all are sinners, broken in some measure by this fall. Though Christians are rescued, reconciled, renewed and in process of being transformed, this brokenness also affects us in that we groan, as the whole creation, eager to experience final redemption knowing at present we live in a not-yet-glorified state (Rom. 8:22-23).
- Everything, from our environment to our bodily genetic code, has been ravaged by sin and the fall. Whether the homosexual attractions people experience are the product of their environment, their genetics, or another source, they are not what God intends and so do not render homosexual behavior legitimate.

- Temptation, including sexual attractions, is not sin. Sin is yielding to temptation. Jesus himself was tempted, yet without sin (Matt. 4:1-11, Heb. 4:15).
- The Scriptures have much to say about sexual behavior, from the beautiful affirmations of the Song of Songs to the clear prohibitions found throughout the Bible (e.g., Rom. 13:13-14; 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 6:9-10, 15-18; Gal. 5:16-21; 1 Thess. 4:3-8). The Apostle Paul affirms that among believers “there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality” (Eph. 5:3). All homosexual behavior is specifically condemned as sin in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Gen. 19:4-11[cf. 2 Pet. 2:6-7; Jude 7]; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Judges 19:22-25; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:8-11). This includes both male and female homosexual activity, both the more passive and more active roles in homosexual practice, and all varieties of homosexual acts.
- The gospel is full of grace and truth. It is an offer of grace and forgiveness to sinners as well as a call to live a holy life. It empowers us in the struggle to resist sin, including the sin of homosexual practice (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 4:20-24; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Tit. 2:11-13).
- The church is to be a new community that resembles a family of brothers and sisters united in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit displaying deep relationships of love (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Rom. 12:10; 1 Tim. 5:1-2). Celibacy and singleness is to be celebrated and affirmed within the church family

Implications

Based on these biblical affirmations, we live and minister with pastoral and practical implications.

- We Christians who attempt to follow biblical mandates on sex and marriage are not immune to expressing our own sexuality in sinful ways, for "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory" (Rom. 3:23). We must always be mindful of this and humbly relate to others accepting that we all are fallen creatures.
- At the same time, all human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect because each of us bears the image of God. An LGBTQ person deserves this dignity and respect no less than any other, and we, as Christians, should demonstrate this in our thoughts, speech, and behavior. Speech, including humor, which demeans LGBTQ people, has no place in the Christian community. Likewise, this means we oppose any mistreatment of those who identify as LGBTQ.
- We mourn with those who struggle with same sex attractions, and with their families, but as we grieve, we encourage behavior that follows the clear divine teachings of Scripture.
- We must carefully distinguish between same-sex attraction, sinful lust, self-selected identification, and sexual behavior. It is not a sin to be tempted in the area of same gender sex. Jesus himself was tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He sympathizes with our weaknesses, and he promises to provide a way of escape in every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).
- A person may self-identify as LGBTQ and this may be a way for the person to identify their sexual attractions and acknowledge the struggles she or he faces. However, such self-identification may in fact be sinful if it includes an insistence upon behaviors that express that attraction. Moreover, a believer's fundamental identification should be first as a person “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:4-10; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11); the prioritization of sexual identity must be seen as a form of idolatry.
- Some heterosexual acts are sinful, but all homosexual acts are sinful according to Scripture. One may not equate morally a committed heterosexual relationship within marriage with a committed homosexual relationship.
- Though recognizing that due to sin and human brokenness our experience of our sex and gender is not always as God the Creator originally designed, our recognition of our sex as male or female as a gift from God dictates that we cannot support or affirm the resolution of tension between a person's biological sex and experience of gender by the adoption of a psychological identity discordant with that person's birth sex, nor support or affirm attempts to change via medical intervention one's given biological birth sex in favor of the identity of the opposite sex or of an indeterminate identity.⁴
- We in the Church must seek ways to minister to and support those among us who struggle with same-sex attractions, and those who have family members or others close to them who identify as LGBTQ.

- We in the Church must seek ways to reach out in love to those in our society who identify as LGBTQ.
- We regard marriage as a good creation of God, and marriage within the Church as a rite and institution tied directly to our foundational belief of God as creator who made us male and female. We also regard marriage as a sacred institution which images the mysterious and wonderful bond between Christ and His Church. To us, then, marriage is much more than merely a contract between two people (a secular notion). It is a covenant grounded in promises between a man and a woman which finds its divinely intended expression in the “one flesh” union of husband and wife, and between the “one flesh” union of husband and wife and God (the divine design). We therefore will only authorize and recognize heterosexual marriages.
- Recognizing the church as a family, we will seek ways to encourage deep spiritual friendships, with a special effort to include those who are single. We will model the counter-cultural reality that intimate, loving relationships need not be erotic.

In all these implications we must never compromise the biblical standard for sexuality while at the same time we must treat everyone, including those who identify as LGBTQ, with gentleness, compassion, and love, while pointing them to the only hope any of us have, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will be “welcoming” but not affirming.

¹ This Statement was adapted from the EPCA Position paper “A Church Statement on Human Sexuality - Homosexuality and Same-Sex “Marriage””

Our Faith Based Policy on Marriage and Human Sexuality

As a result of these above described religious beliefs and our belief in the need for a practice of fidelity to these beliefs, it is our policy that the facilities of this church may not be used for any ceremony that in any way approves of, solemnizes, supports or allows a same-sex union or a polygamist or any union which, in the judgment of the Board of Elders, in some way constitutes child abuse. It is also the policy of the church that no pastor or member of the church staff shall officiate at any ceremony designed to solemnize, promote, create, or approve of such a union. Nor may any member of the church enter into such a union without being subject to church discipline.

A civil government's sanction of a union will be recognized as a legitimate marriage by the church only to the extent that it is consistent with the definition of marriage found in this Policy Statement.

BIG CREEK CHURCH POLICY REGARDING SEXUALITY

(April 2023)

Recognizing that we all struggle with sin, Big Creek Church will provide an environment that welcomes people who struggle with sexual sin. We will seek to love all people in Jesus' name, pointing them towards Christ's power to forgive and heal. While the Bible teaches that those who engage in sexual sin, sin against their own body we also recognize that sexual sin is not characterized in Scripture as being more severe than other forms of sin. We will seek God to discern ways that we can directly and indirectly minister and share God's love with those who struggle with every kind of sin. We also recognize that there is a difference between temptation and behavior and while temptation is sometimes unavoidable, we are responsible for our behavior.

Church Practices Derived from This Policy

Pastors

1. Ordained clergy or licensed ministers employed by the church shall affirm the statement of faith on marriage and human sexuality adopted by this church.
2. Only ordained or duly licensed clergy approved by this church shall officiate at marriage ceremonies conducted on church property.
3. Clergy employed by the church shall be subject to dismissal and/or loss of ordination for violating this statement of faith on marriage and human sexuality or by officiating at a marriage ceremony that violates the letter or the spirit of this policy.

Applicants for weddings performed by church staff and other ministers:

1. Applicants wishing to have a ceremony performed by a member of the clergy employed or clergy approved by the church or to use the church facilities for their wedding shall affirm the statement of faith of Big Creek Church as well as Big Creek's statement regarding marriage and human sexuality and shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
2. Applicants shall participate in premarital counseling by clergy or counselors employed by this church or other persons who, in the sole opinion of the pastoral staff of the church have the appropriate training, experience, and spiritual understanding to provide such counseling. All pastoral staff, counselors or other persons providing premarital counseling shall affirm the statement of faith of Big Creek Church as well as Big Creek's statement regarding marriage and human sexuality.
3. Any individual that is being requested to officiate a wedding at Big Creek Church that is not a staff person will need to be approved by the Elder Team

Use of Facilities:

1. Any marriage performed on church premises shall be officiated by an ordained or duly licensed member of the clergy. Any officiant not employed by the Big Creek Church shall serve at the discretion of the Elder team.
2. Clergy officiating marriage ceremonies on church premises, whether employed by the church or not, shall affirm their agreement with the statement of faith of Big Creek Church as well as Big Creek's statement regarding marriage and human sexuality and conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
3. Clergy and staff assigned by the church to implement the procedures contained in this Marriage Policy may, in his or her discretion, decline to provide church facilities for, and/or decline to officiate at a ceremony when in his or her judgment, there are significant concerns that one or both of the applicants may not be qualified to enter into the sacred bond of marriage for theological, doctrinal, moral or legal reasons.

Membership, Leadership and Staff:

1. Every minister or employee hired by the church shall affirm their agreement with Big Creek's statement of faith as well as Big Creek's statement regarding marriage and human sexuality and conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
2. The Elder team, church leaders and teachers will be asked to affirm their agreement with this policy on marriage and human sexuality and shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
3. All members are expected to live in a manner that is consistent with this policy.