

A Church Statement on Human Sexuality:¹

Homosexuality and Same-Sex “Marriage”²

A Resource for EFCA Churches

Spiritual Heritage Committee

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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.

In this Statement we will focus particularly on the subject of homosexuality and same-sex "marriage."

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.

¹ This Statement is not an official policy and therefore has no formal authority in the EFCA. It is written by the Spiritual Heritage Committee, with input from others, as a Resource for local EFC churches. Any authority this Statement would have, in whole or in part, would be determined by the local EFC church. Churches are free to adopt it as is, or to edit and adapt it as they see fit. If any part of the Statement is used, it is important to give reference to the Statement to avoid the accusation of plagiarism, and to state that it is not an official EFCA policy to avoid miscommunication.

² Because we do not believe this constitutes a God-ordained, biblically defined marriage, we have noted this by including quotation marks around the word throughout the Statement.

- 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).
- 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 LGBT³ 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 LGBT people, has no place in the Christian community. Likewise, this means we oppose any mistreatment of those who identify as LGBT.
- 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, 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).
- In some cases it may not be wrong for a person to self-identify as LGBT. This may be a way for the person to identify the stable trajectory of the person's sexual attractions or

³ Throughout the document the common expression LGBT is used, which is also intended to include QIA (LGBTQIA): Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Ally (friend).

acknowledge the struggles she or he faces with same-sex attraction. 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 LGBT
- We in the Church must seek ways to reach out in love to those in our society who identify as LGBT.
- 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 persons (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 LGBT, with gentleness,

⁴ We recognize that in rare cases some are born with both sets of sexual organs (intersex or hermaphrodites). This is another one of the implications of living in a fallen world, and another reminder that our sexuality has been deeply damaged by the fall. This Statement primarily addresses those who self-select sex and/or gender.

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”.

Suggestions for a Church Policy

In order to avoid confusion and possibly legal action it is helpful for a church to have a written and officially approved policy on marriage. This policy should include:

- A clear biblically-based understanding of God’s design for marriage. You might include something like this: “Marriage is the original and foundational institution of human society, established by God as a one-flesh, covenantal union between a man and a woman that is life-long (until separated by death), exclusive (monogamous and faithful), and generative in nature⁵ (designed for bearing and rearing children), and it is to reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church.”
- A statement that only such marriages which fit the definition above may be conducted on your church property and/or officiated by members/staff of your congregation.
- Clear parameters for marrying cohabitating couples, divorced persons, etc., while acknowledging that such parameters must be interpreted with pastoral sensitivity and judgment.
- A statement of how our definition of marriage is intimately connected to other foundational matters of our faith (here our Statement of Faith may be cited). Therefore we regard any restrictions and definitions we apply in our churches concerning marriage to be an exercise of the freedom of religion clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

It is important to remember that a policy is intended to help us to live out faithfully the truths of God’s Word and to apply it consistently in and through the ministries of our local church contexts. It is also vital to remember that a policy is applied in the lives of specific people, which means we implement them relationally and pastorally with grace and truth.

Issues to Address

The current state of confusion in our culture regarding sexuality and especially homosexuality and same-sex "marriage" raises a number of issues for Christians and for the church:

⁵ This is true whether the couple is able or intends to have children. One of the primary purposes of marriage is procreation. We recognize that there are couples who are infertile and unable to procreate. We are also aware that for those who marry at an older age they may not be able to bear children, or, more likely, they have already raised their family. While we recognize these unique situations, some of which remind us of the brokenness of this fallen world, it does not change the fact that marriage is generative in nature.

- Should we work toward defending or strengthening laws that define marriage in the traditional sense or work toward repealing laws that expand marriage beyond what we believe to be right?
- Should we be content to retain the authorization of marriages in the church, as understood in the traditional way between one man and one woman, while the state recognizes civil unions which may include same-sex "marriage"? This is the situation in many European nations.
- How should we deal with a married same-sex couple who come to faith and wish to attend or join a congregation? What if the couple has children (adopted or biological)? As our churches welcome individuals manifesting a variety of moral and ideological commitments regarding sexuality, can we articulate to what level of integration and leadership such individuals can aspire in our congregations, e.g., occasional visitor, regular visitor, member, minor leadership roles such as usher, substantive leadership roles such as teacher, major leadership roles such as elder or deacon?
- How should we extend the gospel message to those in the LGBT community?
- How should we balance the need to oppose mistreatment of those who identify as LGBT without appearing to defend homosexual behavior?
- How should we respond to educational materials that seem to promote homosexual behavior?
- How do we respond to individuals within our congregations who while themselves manifesting commendable biblical moral behavior in their own lives, nevertheless express confusion or disagreement with the biblical teachings on sexual morality outlined here? What are the implications of such views for the level of leadership for which such individuals can be considered in our congregations, e.g., member, minor leadership roles such as usher, substantive leadership roles such as teacher, major leadership roles such as elder or deacon?

In considering these questions, we must recognize, first, that they are often at the intersection of our understanding of church-state relations and how we practice our responsibility as individual believers and churches in a state where we have been granted the right to speak out on public policy and the right to vote for public officials. Second, decisions need to be made regarding how much effort is given to a particular issue, especially in the political realm, as we could be diverted from other things we ought to be about as the church. Third, we must recognize that our responses to these issues may differ from those of other believers (Rom 14:1ff; 1 Cor. 8-10).

Further Considerations

In conversing with members of our society about same-sex "marriage", be prepared to:

- Explain why you hold to the affirmations given above (and others you may find helpful and/or required).
- Explain why one can accept Old Testament texts prohibiting homosexual acts while not following Old Testament laws on purity and food.
- Explain why the New Testament does not explicitly condemn slavery.
- Explain why God appears to have condoned the polygamous practices of so many prominent Old Testament figures.
- Explain why it is damaging for our society to elevate personal sexual freedom to such a high level (sex as an idol, sexuality and sexual expression as idolatry).

Select Annotated Resources (listed alphabetically according to last name, not in order of importance)

General

The books in this section give some of the best overviews of this topic that are consistent with and supportive of the position presented in these guidelines.

Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

Dennis Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

Dale Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship Beyond an Age of Individualism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

David Peterson, ed., *Holiness and Sexuality: Homosexuality in a Biblical Context* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004).

Biblical

Michael Bird and Gordon Preece, ed., *Sexegesis: An Evangelical Response to 'Five Uneasy Pieces' on Homosexuality* (Sydney: Anglican press, 2012).

This is a discussion taking place among the Anglicans in Australia. This book is a biblical response to a recent liberal critique found in *Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality*. In the latter book, the authors claim there is no biblical warrant for condemning either a homosexual orientation or a faithful and committed homosexual relationship, and they argue it, they claim, taking seriously the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

This is the most detailed and comprehensive study of biblical texts. It is the best exegetical treatment on this topic. If you purchase one book on the biblical text, this is it.

Andrew Goddard and Don Horrocks, ed., [*Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality: Resources for Church Leaders*](#) (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2012):

This was published last year by the Evangelical Alliance and the entire text (146 pages) is available free at the link above. It is an excellent work both biblically and pastorally, and will be an extremely helpful and insightful resource. It builds on the earlier work that had become dated: Evangelical Alliance's Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals (ACUTE), *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998).

Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

This contains a shorter defense of Gagnon's position, which is helpful. But even more insightful is the dialogue which shows how the two views diverge in both hermeneutics and practice.

There are numerous resources on Gagnon's [website](#).

Theological

Robert George, et al., "What Is Marriage?" *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* (2010, Vol. 34.1): 245-287.

This article contains a powerful and convincing argument against SSM based on church tradition, natural law and the public good, i.e. not first and foremost on theological grounds. An electronic copy is [available](#).

Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson and Robert P. George, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter, 2012).

This book began as the article listed above. It has expanded and become much more thorough in its instruction and defense of marriage between a man and a woman. It is one of the best defenses written for the contemporary discussion/debate.

Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision Of The New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996).

Hays applies New Testament ethics in the final section of the book, "The Pragmatic Task: Living Under the Word – Test Cases," with "Homosexuality" being one of those test cases. Hays makes one of the strongest exegetical arguments that the biblical texts are against same-sex sexual relationships.

William L. Kynes, "The Marriage Debate: A Public Theology of Marriage," *Trinity Journal* 28/2 (Fall 2007), 187-203.

Kynes presents a Christian theology of marriage that provides an understanding of God's design for this institution that includes the well-being of the children, which is one of the state's primary concerns. Christian marriage supports this interest and on that basis contributes to the public good.

Christopher Chenault Roberts, *Creation And Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007).

In God's divine and good design he made us male and female, and living in a way that reflects that is what ultimately makes us free. This is an excellent book to study Christianity's sexual ethics.

Pastoral

Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

As a historian, Bray traces non-erotic, same-sex friendships in England from about the year 1000 to about 1900. From this one can learn much, and one can also gain good pastoral wisdom and instruction for helping those who desire to cultivate same-sex friendships today.

Andrew Goddard and Glynn Harrison, *Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction: Issues of Pastoral and Counselling Support* (London: Christian Medical Fellowship, 2011).

Rooted in the biblical teaching of God's design for human sexuality, the authors state that because of the fall human sexuality is more complex than has been thought it in the past. They encourage pastors and churches to be proactive to minister to all, including those with same-sex inclinations, and to do so without compromising biblical truth.

Andrew Goddard and Don Horrocks, ed., *Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality: Resources for Church Leaders* (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2012).

This is also listed under "Biblical."

Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors and Friends* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2010).

Yarhouse responds to questions in an honest, biblically faithful and pastorally sensitive manner. He addresses research about what causes same-sex attraction, sexual orientation and if it can be overcome. He also provides counsel for one helping another who struggles with these inclinations. Importantly, he makes one's identity in Christ central. With this foundation, he shifts from causes to choices one makes in living the Christian life.

Social Science

All of these resources address science and the social sciences. This is an area that has had a profound influence on how homosexuality is understood. In many ways, this has become the cultural “bible” or authority on this topic.

Stanton L. Jones, “[Same-sex Science](#),” *First Things*, 220 (February 2012), 27-33. For an expanded version of this article cf. Stanton L. Jones (January 2012), “[Sexual Orientation and Reason: On the Implications of False Beliefs about Homosexuality.](#)”

Stanton L. Jones and Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000).

Stanton L. Jones and Mark Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007).

Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, “A Longitudinal Study of Attempted Religiously-Mediated Sexual Orientation Change,” *The Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 37 (5) (2011), 404-427.

Testimonials

Julian Hardyman, “[An interview with Vaughan Roberts: A battle I face](#),” *Evangelicals Now* (October 2012)

Roberts acknowledges that he has same-sex inclinations, but he lives under the Lordship of Christ and the authority of the Bible and knows that to act upon those inclinations would be sinful.

Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

Hill shares a similar story to Roberts. It enables one to understand how fellow believers who struggle with these inclinations desire to be faithful, and how we as the church must grow in our awareness of and ministry to these fellow believers.

Christopher Keane, *What Some of You Were: Stories About Christians and Homosexuality* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2001).

This book contains a number of personal stories of the truth of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. God’s grace has and continues to transform.

Melinda Selmys, *Sexual Authenticity: An Intimate Reflection on Homosexuality and Catholicism* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2009).

Selmys was in a lesbian relationship for seven years. When she understood Christ as her greatest treasure and understood his “Beauty” it was that reality that led her away from the sinful lifestyle and to Christ. She converted to Roman Catholicism, and is married with children.

Christopher Yuan and Angela Yuan, *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God. A Broken Mother's Search for Hope* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2011).

This is story of one who went down a deep, dark path into drugs and living the homosexual life. Yuan’s life with drugs eventually landed him in prison, a few short months before he was to graduate from dental school. It was in prison that he began reading the Bible, and God used it to transform his life. With this new perspective, he saw his former lifestyle in a new, transformed way.

Other

Voddie Baucham, "[Gay Is Not the New Black](#)":

This is an excellent argument against treating “gay rights” as the contemporary “racial civil rights”, which is argued by many today.

Kevin DeYoung, "[The Church and Homosexuality: Ten Commitments](#)”:

DeYoung gives ten “broad basic commitments to each other and to our friends and foes in speaking about homosexuality.”

Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

Chapter 8, “The church is homophobic,” presents this issue from an “outsider” perspective.