

God's Good Gift:

A Biblical Statement on Sexuality

Lebanon Presbyterian Church

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Introduction

In our culture today there is tremendous confusion regarding human sexuality. This controversy has spilled over into the Congress, federal courts, state legislatures, the media and also the church. Biblical standards of sexual behavior that endured for thousands of years are now being questioned. Some claim it is appropriate for Christians to engage in sexual relationships outside of marriage. Also, there is a movement within the church to allow same-sex marriages and the ordination of avowed, practicing homosexuals as elders, deacons and pastors.

In times of moral confusion, we look to God's Word for guidance. In times of spiritual darkness, we look to God's Word for illumination:

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."(Psalm 119:105).

As the Session of Lebanon Presbyterian Church, it is our duty to protect the life, health and spiritual welfare of our congregation. For this reason, we offer the following statement to provide Biblical and theological guidance for the flock the Lord Jesus has entrusted to our care.

If you are struggling in the area of sexuality, please know that you are not alone. The truth is that most of us struggle in this area and often we fail to live up to God's holy standard. Here at LPC, we believe the grace of God is far greater than our sin and that his forgiveness extends to all. No matter who you are, you are loved and welcome in this church.

1. What does the Bible say about human sexuality?

God is love. In his great love for us, God gave us the good gift of sexuality. God created us as sexual beings – male and female – with a need for sexual intimacy. Sexual desire and attraction are a very important part of who we are as human beings.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."(Genesis 1:27)

"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"(Genesis 2:18)

2. What is the purpose of our sexuality?

Our purpose in life is to glorify and enjoy God in all that we do, including our sexual behavior. The Bible teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, to be used for God's glory. Sex does not exist simply for our own pleasure and gratification, but to serve, honor and obey our Creator.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?” (1 Corinthians 6:13;15)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.
(Romans 12:1)

3. What does the Bible say about marriage?

God wants us to enjoy a life filled with love, health, joy and right relationships. For this reason, God set boundaries on our sexual behavior. Sexual intimacy is to be enjoyed only within the relationship of marriage between a man and a woman. As human beings, we are *designed* for marriage. The Biblical definition of marriage is found in both the Old and New Testament and in the words of Jesus.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” (Ephesians 5:31)

4. Is marriage really necessary? Why can't I have sex outside of marriage?

Marriage is not a human invention or a legal agreement between two people. It is God's will for us, ordained at the time of creation. It is not something we are free to change or re-invent. Marriage between a man and woman is the only sexual relationship God has ordained and blessed. The Bible offers no alternatives to this relationship. The Biblical definition of marriage is affirmed in the Old and New Testament in the words of Jesus.

“Haven't you read...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.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

“There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death.”
(Proverbs 14:12)

“You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!” (Mark 6:9)

5. Why is it so important that sex be enjoyed only within marriage?

Marriage provides an environment of safety and permanence in which sexual intimacy is a joy and delight. Marriage provides for the nurture of children and the mutual needs of husband and wife. Marriage also protects us from the risk of sexually-transmitted disease. Also, marriage and family life are essential to the stability of the church and society. Within the marriage relationship we are free to enjoy the gift of sexuality as God intended, without fear, guilt or shame.

“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”
- Genesis 2:25

“Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time...” (1 Corinthians 7:2-5)

6. Why is marriage so important in the eyes of God?

The marriage relationship between man and woman is a reflection of Christ’s relationship with his church. It is a model of Christ’s love, faithfulness, service and devotion to us, and our love and devotion to Him.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.”
(Ephesians 5:25-32)

“As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”
(Isaiah 62:5)

7. What does the Bible say about adultery?

As Christians we are called to a life of sexual purity. For those who are married this means being sexually faithful to our husband or wife.

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14)

“You have heard it said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that

anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27)

“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” (Hebrews 13:4)

8. What about Christians who are single? Can they have sex outside of marriage?

Not all Christians get married. Many Christians remain single all their lives and there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, the Bible says that unmarried people can serve God with greater devotion because they don't have to worry about caring for a spouse or children (1 Corinthians 7:8). However, the Bible also says that unmarried Christians are called to live a life of sexual purity and chastity. Sex outside of marriage is not appropriate for single Christians.

“An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit.” (1 Corinthians 7:32)

“If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants...they should get married.” (1 Corinthians 7:36)

“Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn.” (1 Corinthians 7:8-9)

9. Does the Bible allow divorce?

God intends for marriage to last a lifetime. According to Jesus, divorce is only allowed in the case of adultery when a husband or wife has been sexually unfaithful to his or her spouse. Jesus told his disciples that divorce was not God's plan for human beings, but is the result of our own sin and failure.

However, it is important to realize that there are many reasons for divorce. There are some people who did not choose to be divorced, but who had a spouse who was unfaithful or who left them. For others, divorce was the only way out of an abusive relationship. For still others, the marriage relationship was destroyed by substance abuse and addiction. Although the Bible strongly condemns divorce, it does not condemn people who have suffered the pain of a failed marriage. God suffers with us in our pain and calls us to draw closer to him.

“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:8-9)

"I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel. (Malachi 2:16)

"May your fountain be blessed and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife?" (Proverbs 5:18,20)

10. What does the Bible say about sexual immorality?

Sexual immorality is a sin against God that causes physical, emotional and spiritual damage to ourselves and others. It can lead to unwanted pregnancy, disease, suffering, death and eternal judgment. The Bible warns us not to engage in sexual immorality of any kind.

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18)

"In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire." (Jude 7)

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery....envy drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 6:19,21)

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality...for of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things god's wrath comes on those who are disobedient." (Ephesians 5:3)

11. What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

Homosexuality is not God's design for human beings but is a sin and a perversion of our sexuality. If we engage in homosexual behavior we are being disobedient to God.

"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable." (Leviticus 18:22)

"If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable." (Leviticus 20:13)

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” (Romans 1:21,24,26-27)

12. What does the Bible say about pornography?

It's not just our outward actions that matter to God, but our thoughts and our hearts. Jesus said that "...anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27). The Bible says that sexual immorality begins in the heart and the eyes, with our thoughts and fantasies. Pornography for many people becomes an addiction that takes the place of true intimacy with our husband or wife.

“Do not lust in your heart after her beauty, or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life.” (Proverbs 6:25)

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.” (Colossians 3:5)

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-23)

13. If I am guilty of sexual sin, is God able to forgive me?

No matter how deeply we have fallen into sexual sin, God is able to forgive us. By his death on the cross, Jesus Christ has paid the death penalty for all our sins. All we need to do is repent and ask Jesus to forgive us and all our sins will be washed away.

14. If I am saved by grace and my sins are forgiven, doesn't that mean I'm free to be sexually immoral?

Jesus died on the cross so that we would have freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin. As Christians, we're called to turn away from sin and to lead a life that is pleasing to God. When Jesus spoke to a woman who was caught in the act of adultery, he told her: *“I do not condemn you but go and sin no more.” (John 8:11)*

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love.” (Galatians 5:13)

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit." (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

15. Sexual temptation is very hard to resist. Where do I find the power to change and stop doing things that I know are wrong?

The Bible says that all of us are born with a sinful nature. All of us struggle with sexual temptation. We can't change our behavior with willpower alone. In Jesus Christ, we find a new power to overcome sin and start a different life. This life-changing power comes from the Holy Spirit living within us.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you." (Romans 8:9)

"Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:19,20,22-24)

16. My sex life is my own private business, isn't it? Why should the church tell me what to do?

As Christians, we belong to the body of Christ. For this reason, the behavior of one church member impacts all of us. If we are behaving in ways that are sexually immoral, it can impact our family, our church, our community and future generations.

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin....restore him gently..." (Galatians 6:1)

"See that no one is sexually immoral..." (Hebrews 12:16)

17. What should the church do if a member is behaving in ways that are sexually immoral?

As Christians, we are accountable to each other. If a church member is behaving in ways that are sexually immoral, the church has a responsibility to counsel that person and urge them to repent. The purpose of church discipline is not to judge or condemn but to heal and restore.

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans. A man has his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

17. How should the church behave toward people who are not Christians and who are sexually immoral?

Jesus loved sinners – he never treated them with hatred or contempt. As followers of Jesus, it is our duty to reach out to those who have fallen into sexual sin and to show them love, compassion and forgiveness.

“When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’ (Matthew 9:11-13)

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.”

(1 Timothy 1:15)

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:17)

18. Sex is such a controversial topic today. I’m afraid that if I speak out I might offend someone. Isn’t it better for Christians to keep silent on this subject?

If we truly love people and care about them, we will warn them about the dangers of sexual sin. As Christians, we must speak the truth in love, not in anger. We must show compassion but without compromising the Word of God.

19. What does the Evangelical Presbyterian Church believe about the sanctity of marriage?

In its position paper on the Sanctity of Marriage, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has strongly affirmed the Biblical definition of marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman, in which the husband and wife become one and remain faithful to each other for a lifetime. The position paper states: “We believe that God has revealed to all people in all cultures at all times a sense of morality in the ordering of human relationships.” The position paper further states: “From Genesis to Revelation, sexual union in marriage is to be between a man and a woman. Scripture emphatically condemns same-sex unions and sexual intercourse between people of the same sex.”

20. What is the policy of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church regarding homosexuality?

Summarizing what the Bible says about homosexual behavior, the EPC position paper on homosexuality states: “The witness of God’s Word in both the Old and New Testaments is clear, declaring that the practice of homosexual behavior including lust, is a grievous sin, and that any who continue to engage in such activity face the consequences of God’s condemning judgment. However, God’s grace offers love, forgiveness, hope and a new life. The necessary response to this offer is true repentance, including turning from homosexual behavior...”.

21. What is the policy of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church regarding the ordination of unrepentant homosexuals as pastors, elders and deacons, and accepting them into membership in the church?

The EPC Position paper on homosexuality states: “Unrepentant homosexual behavior is incompatible with the confession of Jesus as Lord, which is required of members of the EPC. Unrepentant homosexual behavior is incompatible with the ordination vows for the offices of Deacon, Ruling Elder and Teaching Elder.

22. Does the Evangelical Presbyterian Church believe in showing compassion to people who are homosexual or who are struggling with their sexual identity?

Yes, we believe strongly in showing love and respect towards all people. The EPC Position Paper on Sexuality states: “The incarnation of God in Christ is our constant reminder of the absolute necessity of a genuine identification with those we try to reach. Homosexuals need to know an acceptance of their personhood beyond the sexual concerns they bring with them, and that the church views their sexuality as only a part of their total being. The basis for friendship must be the recognition of our common need of the grace of God.”

24. What is our church doing to make a positive difference in the debate on human sexuality?

Our church has already taken a strong stand in support of the Biblical standards of sexuality. We affirm the Biblical concept of marriage as being between a man and a woman, and are opposed to the ordination of avowed, practicing homosexuals. In 2012, our congregation voted overwhelmingly to unite with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church because we wanted to remain obedient to Jesus Christ on this and other issues. As a church, we will continue to build up strong marriages and provide sound teaching and preaching on the issue of human sexuality. We will also strive to show compassion and mercy to those who are struggling with sexual sin.

With deep love for Jesus Christ, the Word of God and the flock entrusted to our care, we affirm this statement and make it available to our congregation.

The Session of Lebanon Presbyterian Church