

Position Paper on Human Sexuality, Gender, and Purity

Revised April 8, 2022

I

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to set forth the position of the Village Church of Barrington on matters of human sexuality, gender, and purity. There is a significant ideological gap between the church and the world in these areas, and that gap appears to be widening. The morality of classic Christianity is viewed by many in our culture as quaint or even potentially harmful. In the years to come, we will likely see the world putting increased pressure on the church to conform. Thus, it is imperative for the church to be clear where it stands.

II

Overview of Relevant Scriptures

Village Church of Barrington (VCB) subscribes to the statement of faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), the denomination to which we belong. The second tenet affirms our beliefs about the Bible:

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.¹

As such, our beliefs about human sexuality, gender, and purity are drawn from Holy Scripture and reasoning from scriptural principles. Following are high level descriptions of the beliefs and principles that undergird any discussion around these topics. Books could be written, and have been written, on each topic. But the key points of what we believe are as follows:

- Human beings are God's special creation; they alone are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). Part of being created in the image of God is that we are moral beings, like God, and God calls us to holiness, like him (Lev 11:44; 1 Pet 1:15-16).
- Gender was created by God: '*male and female he created them*' (Gen 1:27).² Jesus affirmed this as well (Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6). God thus intentionally created only two genders, with each sex bringing unique and complementary qualities to human sexuality and relationships, and each manifesting the image of God in different ways. Gender is not a social construct, but an immutable part of God's creation and plan for each individual. Thus, it is not possible or right to change one's gender without harming oneself and violating God's will for that person's life.

- Marriage as an institution was created by God, and preceded Adam and Eve's fall into sin (Gen 2:18-24). The Scriptures make clear through their example, the first married couple, that marriage was intended from the beginning to be between one man and one woman. Although the Old Testament has several examples of men who married more than one wife, the results were problematic at best, and the ideal laid out in the qualifications for Elders is that a man should be the husband of one wife (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6).
- God created marriage to be far more than a social contract or arrangement, but a spiritual union that reflects his glory. When one man and one woman are combined together in marriage, the two become one flesh (Gen 2:24). This union reflects the unity in the Trinity, and the mystery of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31-32). The complementary nature of a man and a woman holds the promise for children to be brought in the world and raised in a home with both a mother and father, both of whom are ideally needed by children, bringing different aspects of the image of God. The union of two men or two women can never accomplish the one-flesh union God intended in marriage, nor can it reflect the mystery of Christ and the Church, and thus would be a violation of his created order.
- Sex is part of God's creation. Like everything he created, he saw that it was '*very good*' (Gen 1:31). So sex is God's good gift for procreation (Gen 1:28), one-flesh union, and mutual delight. However, it is clear from the Scriptures that God limited lawful sexual relations to one man and one woman within the safe confines of heterosexual marriage. Like a fire that gives light when kept within the confines of a lamp, or gives warmth within the confines of a fireplace, sex can be a great blessing. But if allowed to exceed those boundaries, it can become extremely destructive. God thus gives us these commands to limit sex to within marriage, not to be a Cosmic Killjoy, but to protect individuals and society from harm, and to achieve the highest level of human flourishing (John 10:10).
- The fall of man brought sin into the world and with it a distortion of every good thing God gave us (Gen 3; Rom 1:18 – 3:20). Human relationships, sexual relations, and gender (among a host of other things) were corrupted by the fall, resulting in broken relationships, divorce, sexual perversion, disease, gender dysphoria, depression, suicide, and death. The fallenness of man often treats these disorders as good and normal things, rather than as a violation of the created order, which they are (Rom 1:24-32).
- Specifically, the Bible condemns the following sexual practices: adultery (Exo 20:14; Lev 20:10; Deut 5:18; Matt 5:27 *et al*); incest (Lev 18:6-18; 20:11-22); homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10), bestiality (Lev 20:15-16), rape (Deut 22:23-29), lust (Matt 5:28), transgenderism (Deut 22:5), and fornication, that is, sex outside of marriage (1 Cor 6:9-10, 18; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5). When the Bible describes sexual immorality in the New Testament, it often uses the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get our word "pornography." It covers all illicit sexual activity. In the Scriptures cited above, the Apostle Paul indicates that those who habitually practice such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God, that is, they will be excluded from heaven.

- The good news is that Jesus Christ came to save us from all sin, including sexual sin. If we repent and turn to him, he will forgive us of past sin, give us the grace to overcome the power of sin in the present, and will give us—in the future—glorified bodies in a heaven with no presence of sin. The work of overcoming sin in the present is what we call *sanctification*. That may take a lifetime of crucifying the flesh and growing in grace, as we walk by the Spirit and not the flesh. But even if slow, victory in Christ is real (Rom 6:14; 8:1-39; Gal 5:16-25). After mentioning those who habitually lived in sexual sin, Paul encouragingly says ‘*And such **were** some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*’ (1 Cor 6:11). They used to be that way, but not any longer.

III

Application for Believers: Sanctification

The sexual lifestyle to which we are called as followers of Christ is summed up in 1 Thes 4:3, ‘*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.*’ The Greek word for *sanctification* can also be translated ‘holiness.’ It is often thought of in a negative sense of being separate from our culture, but it is more importantly a process of becoming more like God’s own character. It is an intentional Spirit-led conformity to the character of God. This is based on Lev 11:44, ‘*For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate [or sanctify] yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.*’ This is a call to become like Christ. The Person of the Godhead who enables this transformation is the *Holy Spirit*. The adjective *Holy* indicates not only his character, but also his role in making people holy.

The rest of Paul’s text in 1 Thes 4 is directly applicable to a discussion on purity, as he continues to explain one aspect of becoming holy:

³ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;*
⁴ *that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,* ⁵ *not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;* ⁶ *that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.* ⁷ *For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.* ⁸ *Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you* (1 Thes 4:3-8)

Sexual behavior is to be holy, that is, congruent with our relationship with God. It is also to be honorable to our spouse. Its absence outside of marriage is honoring to one’s future spouse and God, as well as the Body of Christ. Paul reminds us that sexual behavior has spiritual consequences, as well as physical and social consequences.

Unlike many today who would teach that sexual activity is an inconsequential, private activity involving one or more consenting adults, the Apostle Paul teaches in 1 Cor 6:12-20 that inappropriate sexual activity has an impact on one’s relationship to God as well as other people. Our bodies belong to God and he places his Holy Spirit in the bodies of believers. Paul clearly states that our bodies are not our own, they were bought with the priceless blood of Christ. We

are therefore to honor God with our bodies. For Christians, proper expressions of sexuality will promote community by binding a man and woman in a way that nothing else can. It is a symbol for the community found in the Godhead, and its misuse is a symbol for idolatry against God. It is the goal of the leadership of VCB to help all believers toward the goal of full maturity in Christ. This will be manifest in loving Christ by obeying him (1 John 5:2-3) and producing fruit spiritually and for the kingdom (John 15:1-17; Gal 5:1-26; Eph 6:10-20; and Phil 2:1-18).

It is also apparent that God is concerned not only with our actions but also with our thoughts. The correlation is that our thoughts will eventually lead to words and deed. Christ warned us against sinning in our minds, sexually. He equated it morally with actual actions (Matt 5:27-28). We are told by the Apostle Paul to take every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor 10:5), and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). This manifests itself practically by fleeing tempting situations (1 Cor 6:18), practicing spiritual disciplines, filling our minds with the Scriptures, and concentrating on noble and godly activities (Phil 4:8). Knowing that we all still struggle with the flesh, we must confess our failures quickly to God (1 John 1:9), and hold each other accountable in loving Christian fellowship (Jam 5:16). A Christian who is struggling in one or more of these areas should seek out help from spiritually mature Christians, so that no stronghold is established in that person's life (2 Cor 10:4).

IV

Our Practice at the Village Church of Barrington

Based on the scriptural principles noted above, and others:

1. VCB will only perform marriages for one man and one woman. See "Position Paper on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage" for further principles and requirements.
2. VCB will not embrace preferred pronouns inconsistent with a person's biological sex, but will lovingly support and help them deal with their gender dysphoria. Deciding whether or not to use their preferred name is a matter of personal conscience. Wisdom is needed to find the balance between grace and truth. It should be taken into account whether the person is confused or combative about the matter. Congregants will use bathrooms that correspond to their biological sex or the family bathroom on the lower level.
3. VCB will lovingly come alongside those who are struggling with lust, pornography, premarital sex, extramarital sex, same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria, and other sexual sins (among other sins as well). It is the duty of the congregation to reach out in love with the good news of the Gospel to those who are lost and do not know Christ (Matt 9:10-13; 28:18-20). The Gospel message is clear, that we have all fallen short of God's glory and are in need of a Savior and Redeemer found only in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 3:21-26). Those who have developed addictions will need accountability and support to rid themselves of patterns of living that lead them away from God. Our effort will be toward restoration to God and his standard (Gal 6:1). The struggling person must repent of his or her sin and seek the Lord's grace to overcome that sin (e.g., sanctification).

4. Those who willfully choose to ignore or disobey God's design for sexuality will be ineligible for membership or leadership. See the "Position Paper on Elders and Deacons" for the qualifications of leadership.
5. Those who are still struggling with lifestyles incongruent with God's standard, but who are intentionally working toward leaving destructive patterns of behavior and are showing fruit of growing in holiness, would be able to serve in areas using the gifts of helps, mercy, and service for adult ministry, pending approval by the elders. Leadership positions will not be considered during this period.
6. Members of the church who fall from God's standard should be approached with the progressive discipline outlined by Christ Jesus for his Church in Matt 18:15-17, and demonstrated by Paul in 1 Cor 5, so that the body of Christ may be kept pure and blameless. See the "Position Paper of Church Discipline" for more details.

Conclusion

God is the author of human sexuality. He created it for our good as individuals and as a society. But it must be done within the boundaries he has established, or we will face negative consequences—potentially eternal consequences. It is out of a desire to spare people those negative outcomes that we set forth this position paper. Even more than that, we do so for the glory of God. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

¹ <https://www.efca.org/sof>. Accessed March 15, 2022.

² All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.