

POSITION PAPER ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Evangelical Presbyterian Church

One of the issues currently troubling the people of God is the increasing acceptance of homosexual behavior. We of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church believe there is a need to state clearly our understanding of the biblical teaching about homosexual practice. It is also our desire to set forth our position regarding the appropriate response of Christians and the church to this critical issue. As will be developed below, the conviction of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is that 1) homosexuality is a sin; and 2) God forgives repentant sinners.

The Bible: Our Moral Authority

The question of what is moral has become a confused issue in our society. Even some Christian churches and their leaders are granting moral legitimacy to homosexuality. The prevailing ethic in the minds of many has become a “genetically-based morality.” In recent years, various scientific studies have been put forth which claim to prove that homosexuality is a matter of orientation at birth rather than moral choice. If this is the case, it is argued that homosexuality cannot be immoral in that it is part of one’s genetic makeup.

The EPC finds such moral logic to be significantly flawed. First of all, the studies cited to “prove” genetic orientation are tenuous at best. We dispute the premise which would base morality on scientific study. As important as the debate regarding homosexuality is, it is but a single battlefield upon which a much larger question is being contested: How are we to determine what is right and wrong? While we affirm scientific study, we assert that an illegitimate form of moral reasoning to suggest that one can reason from what “is” to what “ought to be.” History has proved that science makes for poor ethics. Human frailty being what it is, it is all too easy to reinterpret scientific findings in such a way as to justify our moral (or immoral) desires.

The EPC asserts that God’s law alone as revealed in the Holy Scriptures is to be our basis for morality. We reject attempts to base morality on scientific study. The Bible teaches that since the fall of man, mankind has been born with a sinful nature. **The Bible teaches that greed, lust, envy strife, etc., are characteristic of fallen man, and in that sense are our orientation from birth. But while they may be our natural orientation, they are still sin.** Simply put, the Old and New Testaments consistently condemn homosexual practice and repeatedly affirm that God forgives the repentant sinner.

The Bible: What It Teaches

We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the infallible Word of God, the final authority on all issues to which it speaks. Therefore sexual attitudes and behaviors are to be judged in the light of the Bible, rather than the Bible being reinterpreted, modified or overturned by current cultural trends in thought and behavior.

- **Men and Women in the Image of God**

Today we see the folly of modern man attempting to deal with human sexuality without a true understanding of who he is. The result is often a confused and fragmented view of the nature of man and woman. Historically, Reformed theologians have accurately reflected the

biblical position that man's nature is not self-enclosed, but must be understood in terms of his relationship to God. Man as created in the image of God is affirmed in Genesis 1:27 which states, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him: male and female He created them."¹

An understanding of biblical sexuality begins with the opening chapters of Genesis, which introduce the prototype family, Adam and Eve, God's perfect design for marriage and sexual expression. How beautifully simple and yet profoundly revealing is Adam's own description of Eve when God brought her into Adam's presence: "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called *woman* for she was taken out of man.'" (Genesis 2:23)

God's commentary follows, spelling out the sanctity and intimacy of marriage, and the bonding of male and female in physical oneness: "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) This statement is reaffirmed by Jesus (Matthew 19:5) and by Paul (Ephesians 5:31).

Here we find the very foundation of human sexuality and discover the distinctives that give man and woman their God-ordained sexual identities. In the benediction that follows, we have not only God's provisions for the complementary relationship of male and female, but also His plan for the propagation of the human race: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it...'" (Genesis 1:28) When God saw that Adam was alone and needed something beyond all the wonders of the beautiful animal creation, He observed, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18) The result was woman, not another male companion, a woman with her likeness to man but with all her beautiful distinctiveness.

Therefore, homosexual practice is a distortion of the image of God as it is still reflected in fallen man, and a perversion of the sexual relationship as God intended it to be.

- **Homosexual Behavior in the Old Testament**

The Old Testament views homosexual behavior as a serious sin along with other perversions of human sexuality. For example, Leviticus 20:13 states: "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." Genesis 19:4-18 recounts the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities given over to homosexual lust and murderous hostility. In recent years, an attempt has been made to minimize the charges that homosexuality was the cause of God's judgment on those cities. Some commentators contend that the word *yadah* rendered "know" in Genesis 19:5 and 8, is used more frequently to mean "to be aware of." This view states that here we have a group of citizens who in a brash manner tried to "get acquainted with" Lot's guests. Such an interpretation is absurd in the face of Lot's pleas to the mob, begging them, "Don't do this wicked thing" (Genesis 19:7) and his efforts to protect his angelic guests by offering instead his virgin daughters, "who have never slept with a man..." to do with as they pleased (Genesis 19:8). To confuse such activity with a desire to be "hospitable" is inexcusable.

- **Homosexual Behavior in the New Testament**

Jesus did not refer directly to homosexuality. However, our Lord made clear that He came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. He not only fulfilled it, He strengthened it. For example, it was not enough to refrain from the act of adultery. **Jesus declared that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart** (Matthew 5:27, 28). He authoritatively interpreted the Mosaic Law, rather than dismissed it, as some exegetes' contend. Thus Jesus affirmed the continuing validity of the Old Testament moral law, including prohibitions against homosexual behavior.

The Pauline epistles include specific statements which speak directly to the issue: Romans 1:26ff, I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10. The Roman's passage is the most detailed. Paul begins with the phrase, "Because of this..." which refers back to the previous verses 24 and 25. These verses trace immorality and self-destructive behavior, which is described as having exchanged God's truth for falsehood (shades of Satan in the Garden) and having turned to idolatry which is the worshiping and serving of the creature rather than the Creator.

"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 with women and were inflamed with lust for one another**. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." (Romans 1:26, 27)

Some Bible interpreters have sought to bypass the clear meaning of Paul's words. Some contend that for those engaged in homosexual practice, such practice can be considered "natural" and therefore pleasing to God. Using the same rationale, heterosexual persons could say, "It's 'natural' for me to be promiscuous; therefore, I feel that in God's eyes, promiscuity is approved for me." God rejects this kind of rationalization. Romans 1:26 points back to the relations God established at the dawn of human history, that of husband and wife being one flesh.

In I Corinthians 6, Paul warns, "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. And that is what some of you were. 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." (I Corinthians 6:9-11)

- **Redemption from Homosexual Behavior**

The spiritual impact of homosexual practice is no different from any other sin. All sin is judged by Almighty God. However, as from all sin, **redemption from homosexuality is mercifully offered in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The word of hope that the church presents is that through the death and resurrection of Christ, God offers to sinners both the forgiveness of sin and the power to live a life pleasing to Him** (Romans 8:1-4). The attitude of Jesus is that of one who consistently loved and embraced the sinner without condoning the sin. John 8 recounts our Lord's gentle response to the woman caught in the act of adultery. He affirmed her value as a person without approving her behavior. In mercy He forgave her

and at the same moment told her, “Go and sin no more.” Mercy is no less available to the one engaged in homosexual practice.

- **Summary of the Biblical Teaching**

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 a true repentance, including turning from homosexual behavior, and commitment to a faithful obedience to the Lord according to His Word.

CONCLUSION

In light of the biblical witness, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church concludes:

1. The Bible clearly states that homosexual behavior is a sin.
2. God forgives repentant sinners. As Christians who are ourselves sinners redeemed by the grace of God, we must reach out to those persons who are struggling with homosexuality, offering them the word of hope that is the Gospel to the end that they may experience true wholeness through the freeing, renewing grace of God in Jesus Christ. “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36) (See Appendix: “Guidelines for Christian Ministry to Homosexuals.”)
3. Unrepentant homosexual behavior is incompatible with the confession of Jesus as Lord, which is required of members of the EPC.
4. Unrepentant homosexual behavior is incompatible with the ordination vows for the offices of Deacon, Ruling Elder and Teaching Elder.

¹Scripture quotes are from the *New International Version*, © Bible Society, 1973-84

(Note: For a discussion of the AIDS crisis, see the **Pastoral Letter on AIDS/HIV**.)

APPENDIX

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY TO HOMOSEXUALS

- **Education**

Through sermons, classes and study groups, the understanding of human sexuality as part of God’s image in us from a biblical perspective should be taught to lay the groundwork of understanding. Church members can also learn how to relate in a constructive, caring way toward those trapped in homosexuality. Those seeking answers to their sexual confusion can likewise begin the journey towards wholeness through reading, teaching, and discussion.

- **Friendship**

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 recognition of our common need of the grace of God.

- **Healing Resources**

Healing in the area of sexual identity and behavior comes through a number of channels which individual Christians and local churches can offer. These include worship, small group and one-to-one relationships, pastoral counseling, prayer, and the services of committed Christian psychologists. Local church programs can draw on the resources of other groups which focus on this area of ministry as they seek to establish ministries to homosexual people. As individuals seek to move away from homosexuality in thought and act, they need the regular availability of caring and supportive Christians who can be trained by the local church for such ministry.

- **Intercession**

The value and place of prayer cannot be overstated. Combined with education, friendship and therapeutic resources, prayer declares to all involved that the risen Lord has power to redirect individual lives and to heal personal images of sexual identity. Both prayer with individuals and private intercessory prayer for individuals function in the mystery of the work of God to free, redeem and heal.

*Adopted by the 6th General Assembly
June 1986*

*Amended by the 14th General Assembly
June 1994*