HUMAN SEXUALITY UNDER THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

A Biblical Statement of Conviction, Compassion, and Christian Faithfulness

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Preamble

Human sexuality is a good gift of God and an important part of human life. Yet few subjects in our present culture are as personal or as contested as sexuality, marriage, biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and the meaning of the human body. What was once discussed mainly in terms of sexual behavior now raises a more basic question: What does it mean to be human before God?

Much of the present discussion begins with the individual—what I feel, how I understand myself, and what I believe will allow me to live authentically. Scripture begins somewhere else. It begins with God as Creator and with human beings as those created in his image (Gen. 1:26–27). Medicine, psychology, and human experience can help us understand important parts of these questions, and Christians should listen carefully to what they can teach us. But they cannot finally determine the meaning of human existence.[1]

The Christian confession begins with this: we are creatures of God, not autonomous beings who possess final authority over ourselves. God created humanity in his image and for relationship with him (Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 24:1; 100:3). Our bodies are therefore neither accidental nor meaningless. They belong to God's good creation and are part of the life through which we are called to glorify him (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 139:13–16; 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

For that reason, I understand human sexuality within the larger biblical story of creation, the Fall, redemption, life in the Spirit, holiness, Christian community, and resurrection hope. God created humanity and declared his creation good. Sin has affected every part of human life,

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1James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 13–53.

including our bodies, desires, relationships, perceptions, and sexuality. Jesus Christ came to redeem sinners and reconcile us to God. Those who belong to Christ are being transformed through the Holy Spirit and await the final redemption of the body and restoration of creation (Rom. 6:1–14; 8:18–25; Gal. 5:16–25).

My purpose in this statement is to set out positively what I believe Scripture teaches about human sexuality and then to consider what those convictions mean culturally, relationally, and pastorally. Biblical conviction and Christian compassion are not opposing commitments; both should flow from submission to Jesus Christ.[2]

Although this statement represents my own theological convictions, I have written these affirmations in the language of the Christian church because they are intended to express convictions grounded in Scripture rather than merely private preferences. The use of "we" reflects the church's shared confession, while the responsibility for the argument and wording remains my own.

Affirmations

1. We affirm that human sexuality exists under the authority of God.

God is the Creator and rightful Lord of human life. Because humanity is created rather than self-originating, human beings receive the fundamental meaning of their existence from God (Gen. 1:1, 26–31; 2:7; Ps. 24:1–2). Sexuality is therefore part of life under God's lordship. Human flourishing is found not in independence from the Creator but in living faithfully within his purposes.

2Jesse Johnson, "Developing a Church Statement on Human Sexuality," *The Cripplegate*, December 11, 2014, https://thecripplegate.com/developing-a-church-statement-on-human-sexuality/.

2. We affirm the equal dignity of every human being as an image-bearer of God.

God created humanity in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26–27). Consequently, every human being possesses inherent dignity and worth. That dignity does not depend upon sex, sexuality, sexual orientation, gender experience, marital status, bodily condition, moral achievement, or conformity to cultural expectations. Every person encountered by the church should therefore be treated as one who bears God's image.

Christian speech and conduct toward others should reflect that dignity through truthfulness, patience, gentleness, respect, protection from abuse, and genuine love of neighbor (Matt. 22:37–40; Rom. 12:9–18; Gal. 5:22–23; Jas. 3:9–10).

Terminology. In this statement, "gender dysphoria" refers to significant distress associated with a perceived incongruence between a person's experienced gender and biological sex. I use "gender identity" to refer to a person's understanding of themselves as male, female, or otherwise. These terms describe experiences and categories used in contemporary discussion; they do not, by themselves, determine the theological meaning of those experiences. That meaning must be considered within the broader biblical account of creation, the Fall, redemption, discipleship, and the resurrection of the body.

3. We affirm God's creation of humanity as male and female.

Scripture teaches that God created humanity as male and female and declared his creation good (Gen. 1:27–31). Genesis 2 develops this distinction through the creation of the woman and the establishment of the one-flesh union of man and woman (Gen. 2:18–25). Jesus later appeals directly to this creation pattern in his teaching concerning marriage (Matt. 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–9).

We therefore affirm that biological sex is a meaningful dimension of human bodily existence. Because the body belongs to God and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Christians should

receive and steward their lives before him (Ps. 139:13–16; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:19–20). The existence of intersex conditions and other variations in sexual development reminds Christians that bodily life is now experienced within a fallen and groaning creation. Such persons bear the image of God and deserve careful medical discernment, pastoral sensitivity, and full inclusion in the life of the church. These conditions do not erase the creational significance of male and female, but they do remind us that human bodily existence is not always experienced in simple or uncomplicated ways.[3]

4. We affirm that biblical maleness and femaleness should be distinguished from cultural stereotypes.

The biblical distinction between male and female does not make every cultural expectation regarding masculinity and femininity a command of God. Hairstyles, clothing conventions, occupations, interests, emotional expression, personality, temperament, and other cultural expectations vary across cultures and history. Christian maturity is ultimately measured by conformity to Jesus Christ rather than conformity to a particular social stereotype (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 4:13–15).

This distinction deserves particular attention in discussions of gender because cultural conventions can sometimes be confused with biblical norms. Christian discernment should therefore distinguish what Scripture actually requires from expectations supplied primarily by a particular culture or subculture.

3Beilby and Eddy, *Understanding Transgender Identities*, 27–28.

5. We affirm that biological sex is a meaningful aspect of human identity.

God created human beings as bodily creatures. In light of Scripture's teaching that the body belongs to the Lord and is intended for his purposes, the body should not be treated as incidental to personal identity (Gen. 1:27; 2:18–25; Ps. 139:13–16; 1 Cor. 6:13–20). Biological sex is therefore a meaningful creational reality to be received and stewarded before God. Christian self-understanding as male or female should be governed by God's purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture. Variations in bodily development or experiences of psychological distress do not, in my view, make biological sex meaningless, though they can make questions of identity and faithful discipleship more complex and call for patient pastoral care.[4]

Experiences of gender incongruence may be profound and painful. Subjective experience is real and personally significant, but it is not sufficient by itself to provide the believer's final account of identity. The whole person—body, mind, desires, suffering, relationships, self-understanding, and decisions—belongs under the lordship of Christ.

The church should therefore walk patiently with people experiencing gender dysphoria. We should not reduce a person to a cultural controversy, nor should we promise that faithful discipleship will necessarily remove the distress in this life. Yarhouse and Sadusky rightly press the pastoral question of what the church's positive "yes" looks like when dysphoria persists. Christian hope rests finally in belonging to Christ and in the promised redemption of the whole person at the resurrection (Rom. 8:18–25; Phil. 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2).[5]

4Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, "The Nashville Statement," August 29, 2017, arts. V, VII, XIII, https://cbmw.org/the-nashville-statement/.

5Yarhouse and Sadusky, "Response to Owen Strachan," 84–89.

6. We affirm marriage as the covenantal union of one man and one woman.

God established marriage in creation as the covenantal, one-flesh union of a man and a woman (Gen. 2:18–25). Jesus reaffirmed this creation pattern (Matt. 19:4–6), and Paul describes marriage as possessing theological significance because it reflects the relationship between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:22–33). Christian marriage should therefore be characterized by covenantal faithfulness, sacrificial love, mutual care, sexual fidelity, and perseverance.

Marriage provides no biblical justification for domination, coercion, violence, or abuse. Rather, Christian marriage should reflect the self-giving character of Christ.

7. We affirm sexual intimacy as a good gift of God within marriage.

Scripture portrays sexual intimacy within marriage as a good gift through which husband and wife express covenantal union, affection, mutual delight, and the one-flesh relationship established by God (Gen. 2:24–25; Prov. 5:18–19; 1 Cor. 7:2–5). Because sexual intimacy possesses this covenantal meaning, Scripture reserves sexual activity for marriage (1 Cor. 6:12–20; 1 Thess. 4:3–8; Heb. 13:4).

This standard applies equally to all Christians. Biblical sexual ethics calls every believer to bring sexual desires and conduct into submission to Christ.

8. We affirm God's call to sexual holiness for every Christian.

Every Christian is called to chastity and holiness. Married believers are called to sexual faithfulness within their marriage covenant, while unmarried believers are called to abstain from sexual activity outside marriage (1 Cor. 6:18–20; 7:1–9; 1 Thess. 4:3–8).

The church should therefore address the entire range of sexual brokenness—including lust, adultery, pornography, premarital sexual behavior, sexual exploitation, coercion, and same-sex sexual conduct—with the same call to repentance, forgiveness, transformation, and hope.

Paul's description of the Corinthian believers demonstrates both the seriousness of sexual sin and the transforming grace of the gospel: people whose lives had been characterized by numerous forms of sin had been washed, sanctified, and justified in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

Galatians 5 places sexual immorality within an even broader account of fallen human desire and behavior. Sexual immorality and impurity appear alongside idolatry, jealousy, anger, rivalry, division, envy, drunkenness, and other works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19–21). Sexual sin therefore provides no basis for Christian self-righteousness. All believers stand in need of the grace of God and the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

9. We affirm that same-sex attraction and same-sex sexual conduct should be considered distinctly.

Some persons experience persistent or unwanted same-sex attraction. The experience of same-sex attraction should not simply be treated as morally identical to chosen sexual behavior, deliberate sexual fantasy, or the public endorsement of a particular sexual ethic. At the same time, such attraction neither places a person outside the hope of the gospel nor prevents a believer from living a rich and fruitful life of faithfulness to Christ. All human desires—including sexual desires—must be brought under the lordship of Christ. Because Scripture locates sexual union within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, Christians experiencing same-sex attraction are called, along with all unmarried Christians, to sexual chastity (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4–6; Rom. 1:24–27; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; 7:7–9).

A Christian experiencing same-sex attraction should not be reduced to that experience. The believer's deepest identity is found in union with Christ rather than in sexual desire or orientation.

10. We affirm the dignity and Christian vocation of singleness.

Marriage is a gift from God, but it is not necessary for human completeness or Christian maturity. Jesus lived a fully human life without marriage, and both Jesus and Paul recognize honorable forms of singleness devoted to the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:10–12; 1 Cor. 7:7–8, 32–35). The church should therefore present singleness not merely as the absence of marriage but as a meaningful Christian vocation.

This conviction also places responsibility upon the Christian community. If the church calls unmarried Christians to chastity while leaving them isolated and relationally impoverished, it has failed to embody the family created by Christ. Jesus expands the meaning of family around obedience to God, and the early church demonstrates this kind of spiritual family through mutual care, genuine friendship, hospitality, belonging, service, and accountability for married and unmarried believers alike (Mark 3:31–35; Acts 2:42–47; 1 Cor. 12:12–27).

11. We affirm that the Fall affects every dimension of human existence, including our experience of sexuality and the body.

Human rebellion against God has affected both humanity and the created order (Gen. 3:1–19; Rom. 3:22b–23; 5:12−21; 8:18–25). Consequently, human beings experience not only deliberate acts of sin but also suffering, weakness, disordered desires, bodily conditions, and internal conflicts they did not consciously choose.

Here we need to distinguish carefully between an experience, what we believe that experience means, and how we respond to it. This distinction is especially important when considering gender dysphoria. A person may experience persistent distress or incongruence concerning biological sex without consciously choosing that experience. I do not believe that such distress should automatically be equated with deliberate rebellion against God. Yarhouse

and Sadusky raise a similar question when they distinguish an unchosen desire or experience from the behavior that may follow.[6]

At the same time, an experience does not become our final authority simply because it is real or intense. An unwanted experience may come without our choosing it. What we believe about that experience and how we respond to it are further questions. Scripture calls us to bring the whole person—body, mind, desires, interpretations, and actions—under the authority of God's Word and into faithful obedience to Christ (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 3:1–10).

The Christian question, then, is not merely, "What am I experiencing?" or, "How can I make this experience disappear?" The deeper question of discipleship is, "How can I faithfully follow Christ in the midst of what I am experiencing?"

12. We affirm that the Christian's deepest identity is found in Jesus Christ.

Human sexuality is important, but sexuality is not the ultimate definition of the human person. The Christian belongs to Christ, has been united to him in his death and resurrection, and is being conformed to his image (Rom. 6:1–14; 8:29; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1–4). Because the body belongs to the Lord, how we see life must be understood within this union with Christ (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

This does not mean that sexual desires, bodily experiences, temptations, or gender-related struggles are imaginary or insignificant. It means that they do not possess final authority to define the believer. Jesus Christ does.

6Mark A. Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky, "Response to Owen Strachan," in *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 84–89.

13. We affirm that Christian sexual holiness is formed through life in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16–25 helps us understand this struggle. Paul does not describe the Christian life as a life without conflicting desires. He tells believers to "walk by the Spirit" because the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to one another (Gal. 5:16–17). The presence of the struggle, then, is not the whole question. The question is what we do in the midst of that struggle.

Paul's answer is not simply, "Do not do these things." He points believers toward a life formed by the Spirit. The works of the flesh include sexual immorality and impurity, but Paul places them alongside idolatry, jealousy, anger, rivalry, envy, and other sins (Gal. 5:19–21). In contrast, the Spirit produces “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (vv. 22–23).

“Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” and are called to keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:24–25). For that reason, biblical sexual holiness is more than avoiding certain behaviors. It is learning to live every part of life under the lordship of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God's grace in Christ therefore gives both pardon and power for a changed life. No sexual sin lies beyond Christ’s forgiveness, and no believer is left to pursue holiness alone. This does not mean that every unwanted desire, temptation, psychological struggle, physical limitation, or experience of dysphoria will disappear in this life. Our hope rests in belonging to Christ, receiving God's sustaining grace, growing in holiness through the Spirit, and awaiting the redemption of the whole person (Rom. 8:18–25; 2 Cor. 12:7–10; Phil. 3:20–21).

14. We affirm that Christian truth should be expressed with Christian love.

Jesus Christ came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Christian faithfulness therefore joins conviction with charity. The church should be a community in which difficult questions can be discussed without humiliation, people can be known rather than stereotyped, repentance can occur within grace, suffering can be shared without simplistic answers, and truth can be spoken in love (Gal. 6:1–2; Eph. 4:15; Col. 4:5–6; 1 Pet. 3:15–16).

Patient pastoral care requires listening to the particular person rather than assuming that every experience follows a single narrative. Christian conviction is not weakened by careful listening; it is expressed faithfully when truth is joined to humility, patience, and love.[7]

Implications

Cultural Implications

These affirmations will sometimes place the church in tension with the surrounding culture, especially where personal experience or individual autonomy is treated as the final authority for identity. Scripture begins with a different confession: we are created by God, bodily creatures accountable to him, redeemable through Christ, and capable of Spirit-enabled transformation. The church should neither withdraw from these conversations nor simply adopt the assumptions of the culture around us.

Christians should speak clearly about marriage, sexuality, sex, and gender while treating those who disagree with dignity and respect. The church should also examine its own

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7Mark A. Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky, "The Complexities of Gender Identity: Toward a More Nuanced Response to the Transgender Experience," in *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 101–30, esp. 128–30.

assumptions. Cultural influence does not come only from outside Christianity. Churches may turn culturally conditioned expectations concerning masculinity, femininity, marriage, family, and sexual fulfillment into standards that Scripture itself does not impose. Faithfulness therefore requires that both contemporary culture and Christian subculture remain accountable to Scripture.

Relational Implications

Biblical convictions concerning sexuality should shape Christian relationships. People should never become merely "issues." A person experiencing same-sex attraction is more than a sexuality question. A person experiencing gender dysphoria is more than a gender question. A spouse who has committed adultery is more than an act of infidelity. A person struggling with pornography is more than a sexual failure. A single Christian is more than an unmarried person.

Christians should therefore cultivate relationships characterized by honesty, patience, hospitality, confidentiality, accountability, repentance, forgiveness, and love. Christian love does not require agreement with every belief or decision another person makes. Likewise, theological disagreement does not release Christians from the obligation to love.

The fruit of the Spirit provides an appropriate measure of how Christians should conduct even difficult conversations concerning sexuality. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" should characterize not only what Christians believe but how Christians treat those with whom they disagree (Gal. 5:22–23). The goal of Christian relationships is not merely to win arguments but to help one another move toward Jesus Christ.

Pastoral Implications

Pastoral ministry concerning sexuality must hold together biblical conviction, compassion, repentance, forgiveness, restoration, and discipleship. When someone discloses adultery, pornography, unwanted sexual desires, same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria, sexual abuse, sexual shame, or questions concerning identity, that person should first be received as someone created in the image of God. When sexual abuse is disclosed, however, pastoral care must also prioritize the safety of the vulnerable, truthful reporting, appropriate institutional or legal accountability, and protection from further harm; forgiveness and restoration must never be used to pressure a victim into unsafe contact.

Pastors and Christian leaders should listen carefully, ask thoughtful questions, distinguish experience from interpretation and behavior, avoid unnecessary assumptions, recognize the limits of their expertise, and respond appropriately to disclosures of abuse or coercion. Legitimate medical, psychological, legal, and safeguarding knowledge may inform pastoral understanding while Scripture continues to provide the theological authority governing Christian belief and discipleship.

The church must also offer more than prohibitions. It is insufficient to tell Christians what they must not do without helping them understand what faithful Christian life can positively become. Paul's command is not merely to avoid the works of the flesh but to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16). Biblical discipleship therefore offers worship, prayer, Scripture, friendship, service, vocation, accountability, reconciliation, forgiveness, holiness, communion, spiritual family, suffering with hope, and growing conformity to Jesus Christ. Through these ordinary means of Christian life, believers learn together what it means to keep in step with the Spirit.

The sexually unfaithful spouse needs more than condemnation; repentance and, where possible, restoration must be pursued. The person trapped in pornography needs accountability, truth, forgiveness, and renewed patterns of holiness. The person carrying sexual shame needs to understand the cleansing and restoration available in Christ. The person experiencing same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria needs more than a theological verdict; that person needs Christian community in which costly faithfulness is accompanied by costly friendship.

The church should therefore walk alongside people rather than merely pronounce conclusions about them. The pastoral question is not merely, “What behavior must stop?” It is also, “What would walking by the Spirit look like in this person’s life?” That question does not weaken biblical holiness. It places holiness within the larger biblical doctrine of sanctification.

Final Affirmation: Under the Authority of the Word

The questions surrounding human sexuality are deeply personal and often difficult. For that reason, Christians need to listen carefully, speak graciously, and distinguish biblical conviction from cultural assumption. We should also be willing to admit when Christians have spoken truth without demonstrating the love of Christ.

Yet listening carefully does not mean that human experience becomes our final authority. Neither does psychology, science, culture, tradition, or personal conviction. Each may help us understand important parts of the discussion, but none can occupy the place belonging to God's revealed Word. The final issue is therefore larger than sexuality, gender identity, or marriage. The question ultimately is whether God's Word will remain the controlling authority for what we believe.

Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury close their prologue to *Coming to Grips with Genesis* with a simple challenge: "God has spoken . . . are we listening?" For me, that question reaches

well beyond the creation debate in which they posed it. If God has spoken about creation, the human body, marriage, sexuality, holiness, and our identity in Christ, then the question is whether I will allow his Word to shape what I believe—even when doing so places me at odds with the culture around me or with my own experience.[8]

I therefore affirm human sexuality as a good gift of God, grounded in creation, expressed through our existence as male and female, ordered toward holiness and covenantal faithfulness, affected along with all human existence by the Fall, redeemed under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and progressively brought into conformity with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Those who belong to Christ are not called to deny the reality of their struggles, but neither are those struggles given final authority over their identity. We are called to walk by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, and look toward the day when Christ will complete the redemption of the whole person.

At the same time, the gospel reminds us that none of us approaches these questions from a position of moral superiority. We are all sinners in need of grace. No form of sexual sin places a person beyond the reach of Christ, and no struggle with sexuality or gender places someone outside his invitation. The same Christ who calls sinners to repentance offers forgiveness, reconciliation with God, new life, and the power of the Holy Spirit to walk differently (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Rom. 6:1–14; 10:9–13).

This brings me back to Galatians 5. Those who belong to Christ are called to walk by the Spirit and to keep in step with the Spirit. That is true for the person struggling with adultery or pornography. It is true for the person experiencing same-sex attraction. It is true for the person

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8Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, "Prologue," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 21.

experiencing gender dysphoria. And it is true for me. We should hold these convictions with truth, but never cruelty; with conviction, but never arrogance; with compassion, but never compromise; and always with grace toward every person created in the image of God (1 Thess. 5:14).

The church's calling, then, is not simply to win an argument about human sexuality. It is to remain faithful to God's Word and, in doing so, bear faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

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