

FIRST CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN OF WINTER PARK INC.

STATEMENT ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

The basis for this official statement of Winter Park Church a/k/a First Church of the Brethren of Winter Park Inc. is:

“The Old and New Testaments, inerrant as originally given, were verbally inspired by God and are a complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men. They constitute the divine and only rule of Christian faith and practice.”

Christian understanding of human identity is grounded in the Word of God. The significance of human sexuality is particularly evident in the account of creation. Human beings, fashioned by God in His own image, are created male and female (Genesis 1:27). This complementary nature of human sexuality is affirmed again in the second chapter of Genesis. Woman is fashioned out of man (Genesis 2:18–24). Thus, from the beginning human sexual identity is reciprocal. That is, one’s own human nature is properly understood in complementary relationship to another who is alike in nature, but opposite sexually. Like the rest of God’s creation, the sexual differences between man and woman are pronounced “very good” (Genesis 1:31). We therefore affirm human sexuality to be a gift of God. By God’s grace, human sexuality both enriches and fulfills our personhood.

Sexuality is an essential attribute of human nature. It is an obviously significant influence in human life, but our Creator did not intend it to be the defining characteristic of humanness. As a result of humankind’s fall from innocence (Genesis 3), the complementary nature of human sexuality, like all other human relationships has been distorted. Adam and Eve’s disobedience did not only lead to death and separation from God, it also alienated human beings from one another. This alienation distorts sexual relationships between men and women. Holy Scripture indicates that human beings are created in the image of God. The essential characteristics of humanness are therefore found in those attributes endowed by God at creation and given by God’s grace as a result of knowing Christ. Paul, the apostle, urged followers of Christ to understand that “there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The apostle’s words are intended to place human sexuality in a redemptive context. It is of secondary importance to an individual’s relationship to God. That relationship is equally accessible to both sexes through one’s faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. This understanding of human sexuality is reflected in the teaching of Jesus Himself. Our Lord Jesus addressed matters of human sexuality and marriage on several occasions. Jesus clearly taught that love rather than sex is the primary bond in all Christian relationships. Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love one’s neighbor (Mark 12:28–30).

Sexual practices that have been divorced from loving, covenantal relationships between men and women pervert God’s intentions and result in sinful, exploitive, and promiscuous behavior that ruptures relationships between men and women, and erodes the relationship between human

beings and their Creator. Humanity's failure to ground sexual identity in God's creative intent and holy character violates Biblical standards of sexual purity.

In Matthew 15:19, Jesus teaches that immoral behavior starts first in the heart and mind. Self-indulgent thoughts of sexual fulfillment outside of God's creative intent constitute inward sins of lust. No sexual act can be proper if it is driven by desires that are contrary to the best interest of another human being or if it treats persons as impersonal objects intended only for personal gratification. Passion aroused by producing or viewing images of a sexual nature is morally unacceptable. We reject the idea that pedophilia, voyeurism, prostitution, or pornography is ever morally justified. We reject all attempts at constructing one's own sexual identity by medically altering the human body, cross dressing, or similarly practicing behaviors characteristic of the opposite sex as morally objectionable and sinful (Deuteronomy 22:5).

Holy Scripture bears witness to God's will regarding human sexuality. Sexual desire is rightfully fulfilled only within the lifelong union of a man and a woman in (holy) matrimony. Unmarried singles who abstain from sex can be whole, mature persons, as pleasing to God as persons who are faithful in marriage. Sexual celibacy is a worthy state for mature men and women (Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:1, 8).

Heterosexual marriage is rooted in the order of creation. It is not just a matter of tradition. Marriage is intended to be an enduring covenantal relationship which reflects Christ's own unconditional commitment to the Church (Ephesians 5:25–27). God established marriage as a union of one man and one woman within which it is good, right, and proper to engage in sexual relations. Matrimonial customs may differ from one culture to another but the fundamental divine intent for marriage may not be changed on the basis of mere preference, custom, or culture. The dictates of culture, tradition, or personal preference must be brought into submission to the Word of God. Marriage cannot be redefined at the caprice of public opinion and must not be allowed to shift with the changing tide of cultural mores or social practice.

All sexual relationships outside of marriage are condemned by Holy Scripture. They are therefore never appropriate. This includes all forms of intimate sexual stimulation that excite passion and sexual activity between unmarried individuals (Matthew 5:27–29; Galatians 5:19). Such behavior offends God and often causes physical and emotional pain as well as loss in this life. God's blessing rests on sexual intimacy only when it occurs within the boundaries of marriage. Thus, we do not believe that the church should welcome into its membership any person who willfully refuses to turn away from the sin of living in a sexual relationship outside of marriage (1 Corinthians 5:1–13).

In the New Testament, Jesus confirms the heterosexual creation of human beings: *God made them male and female* (Matthew 19:4). Throughout Scripture heterosexual families consisting of a father, mother, and their children (unless they are unable to bear children) are the norm of society. The New Testament reinforces the teaching of heterosexual love and sexual relations within marriage (Ephesians 5:22–33; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:1–5).

Alongside this clear biblical teaching on God's design for heterosexual marriage are found specific instructions that prohibit homosexual conduct, for example: *Do not lie with a man as*

one lies with a woman; that is detestable (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13). Homosexual conduct is declared to be detestable because it is out of harmony with the purpose for which God created human beings.

The New Testament states: *They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. 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 1:25–27). Worshipping the creation more than the Creator not only alienated human beings from God but also distorted their heterosexual identity as created by God. Homosexual conduct gives evidence of the universal human rejection of God’s supreme glory and, like all forms of sexual behavior that violate God’s original design, it is sin.

The New Testament further states: *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 6:9–10).

The same passage of Scripture strongly affirms the liberating power of the Christian gospel. Sinful men and women may be freed from all former sinful patterns of life, including sexual sin, whether heterosexual or homosexual: *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* (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Like all other sins, the corruption of sexual sin can be fully forgiven through repentance and faith in Christ’s atoning work even though physical and psychological scars caused by sexual sin cannot always be erased in this life. We grieve with those who suffer hardships caused by sexual immorality, even if it is caused by their sinful acts. We strive to give aid in ways that do not deny personal responsibility for sexual behavior. We believe Christ set an example of loving ministry to those who suffer from the results of their own acts of sin in the example of the woman caught in adultery, “...*Then neither do I condemn you,*” *Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin”* (John 8:3–11).