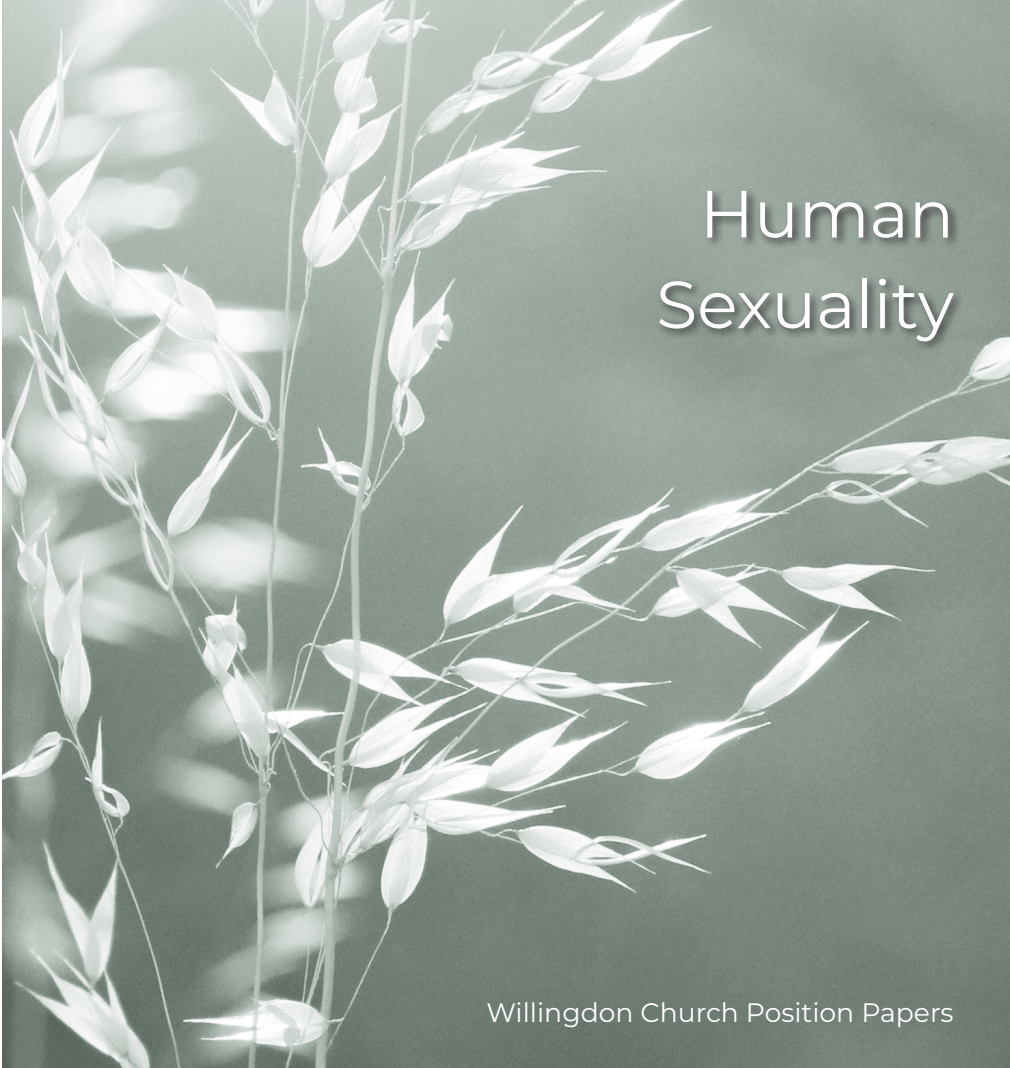






WILLINGDON  
CHURCH



# Human Sexuality

Willingdon Church Position Papers





# Human Sexuality

Willingdon Church Elders  
(Affirmed February 3, 2018)

## 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to examine key biblical texts which clarify God's perspective on human sexuality and provide a foundation for pastoral application in our day.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. CORE CONVICTIONS

- a. Jesus came that we might all have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).
- b. Sexual practice really matters and we all need to grow in our understanding of human sexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 18-20).
- c. We all depend on the written revelation of God, the Bible, to receive God's perspective on human sexuality (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

- d. As we move from the brokenness of sin to wholeness in Christ, we must extend grace to one another without compromising the truth of God (John 1:14).

## 3. BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is an exclusive, covenant relationship for life between one man and one woman, publicly recognized, consummated by heterosexual union, and providing an environment for bearing and nurturing children (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Eph. 5:31).

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<sup>1</sup>Canadians have diverse ways of practicing marriage in a pluralistic society. Our society has determined that marriage can be lifelong or temporary, legalized or common-law, same-sex or heterosexual, with one spouse or a succession of spouses. Cohabitation, for many, is a valid alternative to marriage. Canadian law requires only three elements for marriage: exclusivity, public recognition (lawful) and the union of two people (monogamous). Marriage, under Canadian law, requires neither a life-long pledge nor a heterosexual union. Canadians have different understandings of sexuality. The elevation of self and the unrestrained pursuit of sexual love, as higher values, have challenged the biblical foundation for heterosexual marriage. Sexual activity has become the domain of two consenting persons, with or without love, committed or uncommitted, heterosexual or otherwise (Civil Marriage Act, S.C. 2005, c. 33)

## 4. GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MARRIAGE

### 4.1. A Context to Experience the Joy of Sexual Intimacy

God created human beings “in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27-28). Human sexuality is a gift from God, not of our human invention, designed for oneness and the continuation of human life, to be enjoyed in the union of one man and one woman. The Scriptures counsel marriage partners to not deny each other sexual intimacy, which is both natural and God's design for marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-5).

Marriage is introduced in response to God's observation that “it is not good that the man should be alone.” So God declares: “I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18-20). The marriage relationship is modeled after God, who does not exist in isolation, but in loving relationship. God wanted someone like Adam, but different from him, to be his companion. He created someone “suitable for him” to complement him. Man and woman differ in sexuality but are equals as bearers of God's image and in their standing before God. Together they express the wonderful duality of gender that God created in humanity – “and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:26-31; Eph. 5:31-32).

Jesus bases his teaching on the creation mandate. Weaving together Genesis 1:28, “he who created them from the beginning made them male and female” (Mt. 19:4), and Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5), Jesus taught that, at its heart, marriage is a unique union, between a man and a woman, where they become one flesh in a life-long covenant relationship (Mt. 19:4-

6). The intimacy of the marriage union demands faithfulness for life (Romans 7:2-3; cf. Mt. 22:30; Mark 10:9; 1 Cor. 7:39).

In marriage, God himself knits together a man and a woman – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually (1 Cor. 6:16-20; Eph. 5:31). Heterosexual union within covenant marriage offers a depth of intimacy unparalleled in any other relationship. It is a pleasurable celebration of the commitment of two partners (Prov. 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; Eccl. 9:9).

### 4.2. A Living Model of God's Covenant Faithfulness

The Scriptures use the word “covenant”, in a variety of ways, to describe the loyalty that endures in bonded relationship (Genesis 2:16, 3:15, 9:8-17, 12:1-3; 15:1-16; Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 30:3; 2 Samuel 7:16; Jeremiah 31:31). The concept of covenant is rooted in the understanding of God's covenant faithfulness in His relationship to His people. He will always fulfill what He has said He will do, no matter the unfaithfulness of the other party. This theme permeates the Old and New Testaments. When God makes a covenant, He will never break it. It is an eternal commitment on His part to the covenant partner.

The Bible teaches that marriage was designed to picture God's covenant relationship with his people. God is steadfast in his love and ever faithful toward his people. The Old Testament prophets express God's desire that Israel be like a virgin bride who gives herself willingly, continually and exclusively to her husband (Jer. 2:2), so becoming his delight (Is. 62:5). God earnestly desires faithfulness (Ex. 20:5; cf. 2 Timothy 2:13; James 4:5). In Malachi, God stands as a witness to the marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14-16).

Jesus, the Son of God, gave his life to make possible a new covenant between God and his people. The New Testament writers refer to the church as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:21-33; cf. Mark 2:18; John 3:29). The marriage relationship, including sexual union, is to image the loving union between Christ and the church. The wife is to submit to her husband as the church submits to Christ. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church. In fact, marriage points forward to the consummation of history and the glorious relationship that God's people will enjoy with Christ forever (Rev. 19:7; 21:9-10; 21:2).

### 4.3. Procreation

In the Scriptures, God charges men and women to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). As a sacred trust, the marriage relationship was designed to have and nurture children. God created; Adam and Eve procreated. To have and lovingly nurture children is a marvelous way of portraying God's nature and character (Eph. 6:4).

## 5. SEX OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE

The Bible teaches that all sexual acts, both physical and emotional, outside the covenant marriage relationship fall outside of God's design and are sin (Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8). These include, but are not limited to, fornication (sexual relations outside of covenant marriage), adultery (a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his or her spouse), bestiality (sexual relations with animals) and homosexuality (sexual relations with partners of the same sex) [Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:10].

In Scripture, sin has everything to do with relationships (Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:5; Ephesians 5:3-14). First, sin is to turn our backs on the God who wants to live in an intimate relationship with us; it is to live as if God's design and his purposes for us do not matter. Second, in the realm of sexual relationships, it is to turn from the gender created to complement us.

The term we translate as "sexual immorality"<sup>2</sup> is an umbrella term for all sexual activity outside of marriage (Mark 7:20-23). According to Jesus, all sexual sin defiles us. God intends that heterosexual marriage be the sole context for sexual union (intercourse). Hence, the biblical writers repeatedly warn against engaging in sexual intercourse outside the context of marriage (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 18-20), a covenant relationship imaging the character and glory of God.

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<sup>2</sup>porneia is a catch-all term for any form of sexual activity outside of marriage. Our English word "pornography" is derived from this term.

## 6. THE BIBLICAL CALL

### 6.1. Spiritual Transformation

The call to all human beings is to repent of their sin and trust in Jesus for salvation. Followers of Jesus submit to the work of the Holy Spirit and seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ (Mark 8:34-38; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; Romans 8:29, 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:1-10, 5:3; Colossians 3:1-11). The call to all who are living outside of heterosexual marriage is a call to abstinence - a chaste and celibate life (Matt. 19:11-12; 1 Cor. 7).

Although the demands of the gospel are challenging, the grace of God is more than sufficient to free us to be who we were created to be and to enable us to walk in fullness of life in God (Matt. 11:28; John 10:10; Gal. 5:1; 2 Peter 1:3-4). All are called to repentance, submission to God's will and transformation. Forgiveness, cleansing and healing are available to all.

### 6.2. Identity in Christ

Sexual orientation is not core to our identity. The call to all believers is to find their identity in Christ. Paul refers to all who have practiced sexual sin as "such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11), but in Christ they are now washed, sanctified and justified. They have a new standing and identity before God. As sons and daughters of the Father, they are a new creation, called to live a life of sexual purity (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:23-29; Eph. 1:3-14). They are to be holy as He is (1 Peter 1:13-16).

All humans have a strong need for relational intimacy. And, although sexual intercourse can fulfill a part of that need for intimacy, it is not necessary for intimacy or wholeness. All human beings made in the image of God can live full, rich lives without expressing their need for intimacy through sexual intercourse

(e.g., Jesus, Paul). The church must recognize that singleness and celibacy does not make one a second class person, nor is a single person, regardless of orientation, merely a pre-married person.

### 6.3. Church Family

A relationship with Christ offers grace, forgiveness and salvation; it also offers us a new family community. The call to celibacy for those who yearn for a life-long partner can be a heavy burden. Meaningful, platonic relationships must become normative for Christian friendships rather than the exception (Romans 12:9-13). As the church develops this kind of relationship, there will be room for authenticity and accountability, a place for struggles and victories to be shared, and a place where sexual brokenness can be healed at the cross.

Many people who struggle with their sexual orientation recount experiences of psychological aloneness and relational isolation. This is an opportunity for the church family to be a gracious, inclusive, counter-cultural community that embraces the broken and struggling with the love of Jesus, proclaims the good news of the gospel clearly and unashamedly, and provides a tangible, supportive family to all. Although not called to condone illicit sexual practice, the body of Christ is called to love all people. The church, called to be "a pillar and buttress of the truth," is also "the household of God," that is, God's family (Romans 15:1-7; Ephesians 4:1-6, 29-32; 1 Tim. 3:15; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 3:8; cf. John 13:34-35).

As the Church journeys together with people of every sexual orientation, it must become a place that is willing to understand the depths of the issues we all face, as well as the struggles, hurts and longings. It must also be a place that

has been educated and is aware of these issues.

## 7. SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

Scripture teaches same-sex intercourse to be unnatural and in violation of the complementary image of God expressed in the maleness of man and the femaleness of woman (Romans 1:21-27). Regardless of genetic or hormonal causes, the call of God is to respectfully submit to his created design for life.

Same-sex sexual activity contradicts God's purpose for men and women. Natural feelings of same-sex attraction do not preclude that homosexual practice is not sin. In Romans 1:26, "contrary to nature" refers to acts that are contrary to the created order. It does not mean "contrary to our subjective experience of what feels right or natural to us."

The complementarity of a man and a woman are foundational to marriage. Two men, or two women, cannot become one flesh. They cannot reflect the union between Christ and his church. For this reason, same-sex relationships are expressly forbidden in the Old and New Testament Scriptures (Lev. 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10).<sup>3</sup>

God takes sexual sin very seriously. Among other sins (i.e., lack of hospitality and injustice in Ezekiel 16:49), God judges Sodom and Gomorrah for sexual sin (Gen. 19:4-5; Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6). Paul rebukes

the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5). A faithful and committed same-sex relationship is no more permitted than any other sexual sin that is unfaithful and promiscuous. At the same time, homosexuality is not to be regarded as a special class of sin.

As mentioned above, the call to everyone is to submit their lives to God's will. Everyone is marred by the stain of sin and all face the consequences of the fall on their sexualities. All will be held accountable for their actions. The implication for the same-sex attracted Christian is that they must also choose abstinence and celibacy. This is the same act of submission for all who claim to follow Christ. The call to take up one's cross and follow Jesus is universal for all Christians (Mark 8:34-38).

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<sup>3</sup>In 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Paul addresses both active and passive partners in same-sex relationships. *malakoi* is a pejorative term used for men who were effeminate; that is, for the younger, passive partners in a man-boy relationship or to refer to male prostitutes; *arsenokoitai* is a compound of "male" and "bed" and refers to a same-sex sexual relationship (this word is used in 1 Timothy 1:9-10 as well). These are the two words used in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (LXX), therefore suggesting that Paul is referring back to these Old Testament passages.

## 8. PORNOGRAPHY

We live in a world that considers the public display of sexual images as normal. Through the means of literature, television, movies, the internet or other forms of media, the average person is exposed to hundreds of sexual images every day and this does not even include viewing pornography. Whereas in times past, financial cost, difficulty of access and public shame hindered the possession of pornography, the advent of the internet has largely removed these natural hindrances. Pornography can now be cost-free, immediately accessible with the click of a mouse and anonymous.

Contrary to this pattern of the world that promotes sexual lust of the eyes through pornography, the Bible says that the viewing of another person lustfully other than one's spouse is sin; thus, the viewing of pornography is sinful (Matt 5:27-28). Moreover, for those who indulge in pornography, it often is accompanied by guilt, shame, fear of exposure, lack of intimacy with God, and the absence of peace. Thus, for those who view pornography, the warning is clear; repent and do whatever it takes to flee from it (Matt 5:29-30; 1 Cor 6:9, 18; Eph 5:3).

Sadly, not only is our world immersed in such impurity, but many Christians, both married and single, also presently struggle with pornography. However, the good news of the Gospel is that we can be freed from the guilt and the power of sin, even the sin of viewing pornography. The call is to trust that Jesus died for this sin and to walk in sexual purity by Jesus' resurrection power and the leading of the Holy Spirit. The anti-dote to pornography is intimacy with God (1 Peter 1:13-16).

This walk of obedience requires faith in God, and our action. We are to rely on God the Holy Spirit through prayer that He may cleanse our hearts and give us strength to resist sexual temptation (Gal 5:16-21). However, this does not mean that Christians are to be passive in obedience, rather we need to daily make the choice to clear our minds from that which is impure, renew our minds with Scripture, lean on other Christians for spiritual support and set up practical boundaries to overcome temptation (Rom 12:1-2; Psalm 119:9-11; Phil 4:8; 2 Tim 2:22; Matt 5:29).



## 9. TRANSGENDER (GENDER DYSPHORIA)

There are only two biological sexes, male and female (Genesis 1:26-28). Gender, the expression of masculinity or femininity, may be environmentally and culturally conditioned, but it is always intimately tied to our biological sex.

Gender Dysphoria is a psychological term used to describe the distress experienced by a person whose experience of gender does not align with their biological sex. Transgender is an umbrella term for “the many ways in which people might experience and/or present and express their gender identities differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent with their biological sex.”<sup>4</sup>

Gender Dysphoria exemplifies how humankind’s separation from God has affected every aspect of human existence. People do not choose to experience gender dysphoria. They choose how to respond to the distress they are feeling. Often, these choices are difficult, especially when people experiencing gender dysphoria are stigmatized and rejected.

The pastoral challenge is to walk alongside those who struggle, while still maintaining God’s design of gender. “Rather than reject the person facing such conflicts, the Christian community would do well to recognize the conflict and try to work with the person to find the least invasive ways to manage the dysphoria in keeping with their biological sex.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015, p. 20

<sup>5</sup>Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015, p. 144

## RECOMMENDED READINGS:

1. Allberry, Sam. Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, The Bible and Same-Sex Attraction  
(The Good Book Company, 2013)
2. Butterfield, Rosaria. Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ  
(Crown and Covenant, 2015)
3. DeYoung, Kevin. What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?  
(Crossway, 2015)
4. Wilson, Todd. Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality  
(Zondervan, 2017)
5. Yarhouse, Mark. Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture  
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