

Evangelical Free Church of Canada

Statement on Gender and Human Sexuality

Approved by the EFCC Board of Directors on May 7, 2022



How do we live out our Lord's grace and truth as we engage with issues of human sexuality that polarize people so dramatically in today's world?

On the one hand, as followers of Jesus our calling is not to judge and condemn others (Matthew 7:1-6), nor is it to wield His truth (the Bible) as policemen or judges.

On the other hand, we obey the Word and encourage each other to do so because we are convinced that it is good – it is God's good plan for human flourishing and for *shalom* (Psalm 119; Galatians 6:1-5). God's Word reflects His desire that we live lives of joy and peace in communion with Him. Yet, we sometimes obey His Word grudgingly (believing the worst about Him and His intentions) or we wield His Word as a weapon of rejection and condemnation toward others.

A proper view of our God, His Word, and ourselves helps us to embrace His Word in our own lives. It also helps us to commend it to others because we know it is perfect, beautiful, and life-giving. Thus, we find the beautiful account of God's creation of the universe, the earth, and all life (including human life) in Genesis 1-2. His creation was very good. God's original design created male and female in His image and all humans since have been 'naturally born' a man or woman (recognizing that on rare occasions, a mutation or birth defect may occur, and a baby is born intersex).

Humans display their Creator's image in many ways: we are creative, rational, moral, and relational... to name a few. The Genesis account shows the goodness of our Creator and His desire for the flourishing of all parts of His creation. He sees that it is not good for man to be alone and so provides an *ezer* for him.

The Hebrew word *ezer* is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament. Sixteen times it describes how God rescues or helps us when we are helpless in the face of enemies and overwhelming circumstances. Three times it is used of other nations on whom Israel calls to help deliver them from their enemies. Two times it describes Eve. The English word for *ezer* is "helper" or "helpmate" but it hardly does the Hebrew word justice. An *ezer* is a partner at the most essential level – a comrade who has your back, works, fights, and enjoys life alongside you.

Hence, we see that God's good plan was for man and woman to commune with Him and each other, in a full, supportive, and beautiful manner. God created Adam and Eve as man and woman. Each of these two genders was created to embody the fulness of what it means to be human. They are physically compatible with one another, created for deep intimacy and relationship. The Creator's good plan is for a man to leave his father and mother and enjoy a deep oneness with one woman by "cleaving" or "clinging" to his wife (Genesis 1:27). Their Creator gave them a meaningful calling to co-rule with Him over creation, tending and nurturing it.

The calling to be “fruitful and multiply” is a testimony to God’s beautiful plan for physical, sexual, and emotional intimacy between man and woman. God’s plan for sex was both for procreation and for pleasure. God created male and female as sexual beings and throughout the Bible we see how He designed sex to be a source of joy for a husband and a wife (Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon; I Corinthians 7:1-5). His plan was for one ‘naturally born’ man and one ‘naturally born’ woman to enjoy sexual intimacy in a committed, monogamous relationship (I Corinthians 7:9). God calls husband and wife to submit to and serve each other, ministering love, acceptance, and respect to each other in every area of their relationship (Ephesians 5:21-33).

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve rejected God’s good plan. Instead, they chose to define good and evil for themselves. This human commitment to self-autonomy, self-promotion, and self-definition naturally creates challenges for human intimacy with God, His creation and each other. Genesis 3 tells of Adam’s and Eve’s original choice to ignore God’s good plan and command, and to go their own way. Their choice led to sin, death, shame, evil, oppression (starting in Genesis 4) and to a brokenness in all of creation.

Like Adam and Eve, all humans are sinners by nature and by our own individual choice. No longer is there perfect harmony between creature and creation; humans and God; man and woman. Adam and Eve see their nakedness for the first time and cover themselves in shame. The oneness between God and humans and between man and woman is now replaced with a sense of “other”. The one flesh relationship where two become one (Genesis 1:27) now becomes difficult as identity becomes rooted in self. Genesis 3:16 speaks of a horrible consequence of the fall. Mixed with a love for each other will be a struggle for power. This disrupts oneness between husband and wife. In addition, the good desires given for things God has created can be twisted, directed at things contrary to God’s original design and intent.

As a result, humans began to seek pleasure outside of the plan of God, using other humans (or created things) in the process (Romans 1:18-32), and it continues today. God’s beautiful plan for husband and wife – to fulfill their sexual desires in a covenant relationship of oneness – gets twisted. Hence, human sexual desires can be fulfilled in a myriad of ways that are outside of a monogamous, loving relationship between a husband and wife.

People are created to be part of intimate, loving, human relationships marked by mutual care and joyful service within the bond of friendship, family, community, and marriage. Human defiance of God and His good plan creates interpersonal challenges for each of these areas. The drive for intimacy is still strong in humans but our sin can motivate us to fill desires in sinful ways that do not provide lasting oneness and joy (Ecclesiastes). Jesus came to redeem humanity from slavery to sin (from giving in to evil desires). Jesus calls believers to ongoing repentance of sin and a submission to the Holy Spirit and His Word.

It is important to remember that being tempted by evil desires is not sin. James reminds us that giving in to and acting upon evil desires is what leads us into sin and death (James 1:12-15). We live in a world that presents a plethora of idols for us to worship, serve, and identify with. Among those idols are a wide range of sexual practices that are outside of God’s intention for intimacy between a husband and wife. As followers of Christ, our identity is in Him. Our desires do not determine our identity – they need not define me as an individual. Christians believe that all

humans have value because they are made in God's image. Reducing identity to any one thing (such as race, gender, desires, social status, etc.) is not only a poor substitute to seeing each human as fully partaking in the fullness of God's image but is often used by humans as justification for considering others to be "less human." This is never an option for a follower of Christ.

Since all humans are made in God's image, we cannot discriminate because of race, class, gender, or gender change. Christ loves all and came to save all (Galatians 3:22-29). Christ is active in redeeming humans and restoring relationships. Unfortunately, restoration will not be perfect and complete until He consummates His Kingdom in the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 22). In the meantime, it should not surprise us to encounter people who are struggling with gender dysphoria. People will seek to address this felt disjunction between their biological sex and gender socially or through use of hormones or surgery. This does not alter the fact that they are still made in the image of God. It also should not surprise us to encounter individuals who have same-sex desires or who as heterosexuals attempt to satisfy their desires in ways that are outside of God's plan for husband and wife. We should remember that heterosexual sexual activity outside of marriage is just as much outside of God's beautiful plan as homosexual, transgender, polygamous, polyamorous, or other sexual activities. As followers of Jesus, we rejoice that our God loves to save us from our sin and restore us to Himself.

Ministry in our Contemporary Canadian Context as Evangelical Free Church of Canada Churches

Jesus came to "seek and save the lost". He left us here as His ambassadors to help others be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:17-20). As His children we are to live holy lives, but we are not to expect those outside of the church to believe or behave as we do (I Corinthians 5).

During His ministry, Jesus modelled a beautiful acceptance of very imperfect, sinful people. He called a myriad of sinners to follow Him. In fact, Jesus welcomed people to follow Him and to associate with Him long before they believed in Him. In essence, Jesus befriended them and welcomed them as part of His physical family/fellowship. Over time they come to believe in Him (which then would make them belong to the family of God). Subsequent to believing in Him, the Holy Spirit helped them to behave in ways that honored Christ.

In the North American church, we have often presented the church as a moral institution that should shun sinners. This approach demands that a person must first behave rightly, then believe rightly, before the church will befriend and fellowship with that person. When most in the culture shared a Judeo-Christian worldview (and its moral code) with us, this sort of worked (although it led many to embrace a nominal moralism instead of a vibrant relationship with Jesus as Lord and Savior).

Today, most Canadians do not share our view that God created two genders and that man and woman are to enjoy sex only in a marriage relationship. How should we respond to those who are living in sexual relationships that are outside of God's good, intended plan? There are two common responses.

The first is for Christians to change their beliefs and to affirm the broader culture's doctrine regarding sex and gender. The common Canadian view now holds that sexual activity between any consenting adults is good. Additionally, there is a denial of "binary" gender categories (male and female). Instead, a growing number of genders are presented as equally legitimate. Gender identity is declared as something all individuals discover within themselves and choose to articulate. A person's gender may not match their biological sex and a person may change which gender they self-identify as. As people who follow Jesus as Lord and who believe that the Bible is authoritative (and lays out God's good plan for us), this is not an option.

The second is for believers to reject all who engage in sex outside of marriage (of one man and one woman). This rejection is often not consistent. Churches may welcome promiscuous heterosexuals to church (or have a relationship with them) but bar same sex couples or trans individuals from the same things. As a group of churches and missionaries who believe in the dignity of all people and feel called to introduce people to Jesus, this also is not an option. We are not called to force people to behave and believe properly before we will be a friend and welcome them into our churches.

The EFCC motto is "In essentials unity, in non-essentials charity, in all things Jesus Christ". We are Christ-centred, believing that only Jesus can truly transform hearts and lives. This moves us to embrace a third approach – befriend, believe, behave – to interacting with those who do not yet know Him and are engaging in sexual practices that are outside of Jesus' intent:

Every individual is made in God's image. We ought to welcome every person who does not yet behave and believe like us to first be a friend, and to get to know Jesus with us. Our primary calling is to love and welcome people as they are (as Jesus did), not to shun or demean them because of the identity or lifestyle (including our LGBTQ friends) they have chosen. We begin by befriending people where they are at, loving them with Jesus' love, and encouraging our church family to do the same. We earn the privilege of sharing the good news of Jesus. We then trust and pray that as they witness our journey and learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will change them until they conform (more and more) to the image of the Son.

In I Corinthians 5 Paul speaks to dealing with the sin of folks inside the church who represent the church. He notes that we do not judge those outside the church. In I Corinthians 6 he reminds his readers that they are all sinners who were once saved by Christ, are His people and are now saints. This knowledge ought to inspire us to humbly befriend and welcome others (including LGBTQ folks), no matter their lifestyle.

This 'befriend, believe, behave' continuum allows us to minister to folks who do not yet know Jesus. Our church signs often say, "Everyone is Welcome!" Indeed, everyone ought to be welcome in an EFCC church. Once a person places their faith in Christ and are willing to submit to His Lordship in all areas of life, we can invite them to become a member of the church. As we fellowship together, we expect, and we ought to encourage each other as disciples of Jesus. We will speak the truth in love to each other, encouraging one another to be obedient to our Lord.

As obedience to Jesus becomes normative for a believer, we encourage him or her to use their gifts to serve Him.

Obedience in our EFCC tradition bridges two themes from our forebears that we continue to embrace today:

The first is found in our Statement of Faith, where we state that “We accept the Bible in all it teaches, obey in all that it requires, and trust in all that it promises.”

The second was the Free Church cry for its churches – “Believers only, but all believers!” In this, we welcome all believers in the Name of Christ, and will encourage one another to live in alignment with all that God has provided in His Word.

As new believers mature through the work of the Holy Spirit, we then ought to invite these saints to be fully active in our churches, serving in ministries and leadership roles (I Timothy 3). Is this a perfectly clean, easy continuum to follow? Of course not! People are messy – and making disciples is messy too! The work of transformation in a believer’s life may not immediately change all their desires! A person may still struggle with gender dysphoria or same sex attraction, or promiscuous heterosexual desires, or greed, or anger, or lying, or a host of other desires and temptations. Our call is to minister to people, to introduce them to Jesus, to walk with them as they seek to be obedient to Jesus’ calling on their lives. Yes, we teach God’s life-giving truth – but we allow Him to change people. This will not always be neat or easy. We believe that local church membership will be a key point of decision for a believer. They need to affirm that they know Jesus and are committed to following and obeying Him in all areas of life, as articulated in the EFCC Covenant of Personal and Professional Ethics and EFCC Definition of Biblical Marriage. However, decisions about who can participate in the Lord’s Supper; when someone can be baptized; what the expectations are of members – these will necessitate much gracious dialogue in our churches. Yet seeing Christ redeem and transform lives is well worth our humble attempt at embracing truth and love.

Summary

In the Evangelical Free Church of Canada, we hold to the authority of the Word because God is good. His words are pure, true, just, and life-giving (see Psalm 119!). We dare not set aside His words, His good plan for man and woman, merely because it is out of vogue – we want God’s shalom and good plan for people! The kingdom of this world has different values than the Kingdom of God. Our churches ought not to promote hate or reject people because they do not yet know Jesus and so do not obey Him. Further, as loving followers of Jesus, we do not embrace any coercive actions or therapies that try to force people to believe in Him or behave like Him. We have the privilege of befriending people (giving them a family to belong to). We have the joy of sharing Jesus so that people may believe in Him. And we are called to love and teach believers, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform lives – lives marked by joy, peace, truth, hope, faith, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control – until all together we are more and more conformed to the image of His Son!

Further Resources

Preston Sprinkle. *Pastoral Paper*. [www.centerforfaith.com/sites/default/files/cfsg_pastoral_papers_14.pdf]

Wesley Hill. *Washed and Waiting*.

Mark Yarhouse. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*.