

Marriage, Homosexuality, Transgenderism, and Christian Liberty: A Manifesto for Churches and Their Members

The Liberty of Churches and Christians: Obeying Christ as Lord in All of Life

We confess that the church is subject to Christ, who is Lord over all. God alone is Lord of the conscience (WCF 20). While church members ought to obey civil rulers in temporal things, provided they are not required by those authorities to sin (Mk. 12:13-17; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pt. 2:13-17), the church has a divine right to embody her beliefs in her practices and to carry out the mission Christ has entrusted to her without interference or hindrance. The church as an institution shall remain free from state control in faith, doctrine, and practice, and her members should not be forced to act contrary to their consciences, as informed by the Word of God. We gladly render to Caesar what is Caesar's, but under no circumstances will we render to Caesar that which belongs only to God. With these truths in view, we declare the church's right to reject any attempts on the part of the state to impose on the her institutionally or her members individually unbiblical and unnatural definitions of marriage or sexuality.

God's Design for Marriage: One Man, One Woman, One Life

God created man male and female in the beginning for this very reason, that they might be joined together in the covenant of marriage as one flesh (Mark 10:5ff). God created man male and female for the sake of marriage; the male / female foundation to marriage is intrinsic to the very definition of the ordinance. Man is the glory of God and woman is the glory of man (1 Cor. 11:7; Prov. 12:4); man and woman are brought together in marriage to the glory of God. Men and women were designed by God to complement and complete one another. While we admit that overly rigid sex stereotypes have often led to harm, the modern tendency to deny any fundamental differences between men and women is also harmful. There is a human cost to getting human nature wrong.

Marriage: Origins and Purpose

Marriage as a covenant bond between a man and a woman is an institution founded not in cultural convention or convenience, but in God's act of creation (Gen. 2:23-24). Marriage is God's ordinance,

a holy mystery instituted for his glory and our good. It is our desire to honor the marriage bed and keep it undefiled (Heb. 13:4). Sex outside of marriage, sex with someone other than one's spouse, divorce without biblical grounds, and the taking of more than one spouse, are all among the many ways in which God's institution of marriage has been dishonored. We believe the union between husband and wife in heart, body, and mind to be a sacred bond, intended by God for their mutual joy and companionship; for the help and comfort given one another in times of prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. We believe man and woman to be equal in creation and redemption, equal in worth and dignity; and yet the sexes are different from one another and thus complementary in their roles in church, society, and family. God has ordained the covenant of marriage so that husband and wife would together symbolize the relationship of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21ff); he has designed loving and faithful marriages to be the best possible context in which children, as the fruit of their parents' mutual love, can be raised to healthy maturity; and he has called husband and wife to help one another in the pursuit of a common salvation and service to the common good of humanity. Because of the nature of the marriage relation, a believer ought to marry in the Lord (1 Cor. 7:39). We confess God has designed husbands to lead their wives by protecting, providing, and leading them in sacrificial love in the Lord; and we confess God has designed wives to help, submit to, and respect their husbands in the Lord. Marriage vows and ceremonies used in our churches ought to reflect these structural realities God has built into marriage.

Marriage, Divorce, and Society: Covenant-Making and Covenant-Breaking

We believe the preservation of biblically defined marriage as a monogamous covenant between a man and a woman for life to be essential to the well-being and health not only of the church but of civil society. God's design for marriage is woven into the created order, and reflected in the nature of our humanity as men and women. The fact that the human reproductive system is incomplete apart from the other sex – the fact that we reproduce sexually, as a man and woman unite – is proof God made the man and woman for one another in a way that can never be duplicated by a same-sex relationship. Following the Scriptures and the historic Christian tradition, we define marriage as a covenant freely and lawfully

entered into by a man and a woman, sealed by sexual relations (WCF 24). This covenant is to be a lifelong commitment until husband and wife are parted by death. The covenant of marriage can be broken by infidelity (Matt. 19:1-10) or desertion (which includes not only abandonment but severe forms of abuse; cf. 1 Cor. 7:10-16; Ex. 21:10-11, Deut. 23:15). If at all possible, broken marriage covenants should be repaired through repentance and forgiveness, though we recognize there are situations where such full restoration will be impossible or unwise. The session of each local congregation is responsible to determine for her members if there are biblical grounds for divorce (and a consequent freedom to remarry) in any given case.

The Gift of Sex: A Life-Giving Treasure Guarded By the Covenant of Marriage

We believe the covenant of marriage between a man and woman to be the only relationship in which God's gift of sex can be lawfully enjoyed (Prov. 5:15-23). Sex with anyone other than one's spouse is contrary to God's design for human flourishing. The covenant bond of marriage protects the precious treasure of sexuality. Misuses of God's beautiful gift of sexuality through fornication, premarital cohabitation, adultery, pornography, sexual stimulation with inanimate objects as a substitute for one's spouse, polygamy, incest, pedophilia, bestiality, attempts to surgically or chemically alter one's gender, transvestism, the destruction of one's offspring through abortion, etc., lead to the dehumanizing of the self and the exploitation of others, contrary to the law of love. We are urged in Scripture to make a covenant with our eyes to not look lustfully on another (Job 31:1; Matt. 5:27-30), to abstain from sexual immorality that we may possess our bodies in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:1-8), and to not present our members as instruments of sin but to present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:1-14).

Unnatural Unions: Why Homosexual Relationships Can Never Be Marriage

We resist and reject all attempts to redefine marriage to include same-sex partnerships. We can never regard a same-sex relationship of any kind as a marriage, no matter what civil society might say about it. Two persons of the same sex can never be "one flesh."

Homosexual relations, regardless of a claimed “orientation” or consent, are unlawful and contrary to our God-designed natures as men and women (Rom. 1:18-32). While humanity’s fall into sin has disordered our desires, including our sexual desires, God’s original design in the creation of man and woman remains normative (Gen. 1-2; Matt. 19:1-10). The very desire for same-sex relations is called a “vile passion” in God’s Word (Rom. 1:26).

Certainly, we desire to bless, serve, and love persons with homosexual desires or who engage in homosexual practices. We know we are fellow image bearers and fellow sinners along with them, and we long to show them the compassion of Christ. But we cannot countenance the fulfillment of their desires under any circumstances. Rather, we call on persons with such desires to join us in trusting the Lord Jesus to forgive our sin through his shed blood and transform us by his healing grace (though we also fully recognize that living as faithful disciples of Jesus is always a struggle and all of us fall short of the goal in this life).

Marriage Practices: Applying the Truth

We claim the right for our churches and church members (whatever their particular vocation) to refuse to host, officiate, or in any way support same-sex “marriage” ceremonies, not out of animus, but out of love for God, our neighbor, and the truth. Likewise, we refuse to host, officiate, or support other ceremonies that violate biblical teaching on marriage, such as the proposed union of a believer with an unbeliever, or the marriage of an unlawfully divorced person with an outstanding obligation to reconcile to their former spouse. It is our desire to be consistent with the law of God in every respect.

God’s Creation of Male and Female: Immutable Sexuality

Further, we reject transgenderism as a perversion of God’s good creational order. There are only two sexes/genders, male and female (Gen. 1:26-28). Sex is not fluid, it is binary. Sex is not an artificial cultural construct, but a God-given reality. One’s sex is not chosen or assigned, it is created by God. We reject the notion that gender is determined by one’s feelings, or is detachable from biological and bodily givens. God forms each person as a distinct male or female from the moment of conception. Possessing a male or female body is

itself a gift, and includes a calling from God to live out one's masculinity or femininity. As God is the Creator, and makes each of us either male or female, we cannot unmake and remake ourselves into the opposite sex. Sex is an immutable feature of our identity as creatures; thus, it is impossible for anyone to actually change his or her sex.

One's sex is manifest bodily, but goes all the way down to the very depths of our being. Sex is not just biological, but also psychological; sex is not just a matter of our bodies but of our souls. Thus, those with male bodies should live, act, and dress in masculine ways; those with female bodies should live, act, and dress in feminine ways (Deut. 22:5; 1 Cor. 11:2-16). How we live should match what we are. While the ways in which masculinity and femininity are expressed can vary within a certain range from culture to culture and age to age, it is always unlawful to seek to adopt the characteristics or dress of the other sex, or to pursue a sexless androgyny. Likewise, all attempts to alter one's sex through surgery or hormones are rebellion against the Creator. The respective callings of men to be men and women to be women must be embraced. The God-given differences between men and women are good and glorious.

The Sexes and Society: Transgenderism, Public Policy, and Pastoral Counseling

The health of any culture depends on understanding what men and women have in common as image-bearers, and ways in which their vocations and virtues can overlap. But the health of any culture also depends upon recognizing and celebrating the deep differences between the ways in which men and woman are oriented to the world and to one another, the ways in which God has called them to play distinct roles in church, family, and society. Cultures in which the genders are confused, or in which "gender neutral" androgyny becomes the goal, are acting contrary to nature and such patterns of action will lead to frustration for all. Embracing the distinctive callings we have as men and women does not lead to tyranny and oppression but to freedom and fulfillment. Men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, can never be interchangeable pieces; God has designed us to complement one another in a wide variety of ways. The transgender agenda hurts everyone, especially children who are most vulnerable to being confused about their sexuality. The only way to secure the safety,

rights, and privacy of all is to recognize the creational differences between the sexes and to allow those differences to inform and shape public policy and law.

We certainly insist that those suffering from the condition commonly called gender dysphoria (the feeling of being trapped in the body of the opposite sex) be treated with compassion and respect, as their sexual confusion and disorder stems from the fallenness of the world. But we also insist that separating biological sex from gender identity / expression is delusional and should be counteracted rather than indulged. Rather than mutilating their bodies, we would urge them to be renewed in their minds by the power of the Christ, so they can joyfully embrace the biology God has given them. We acknowledge that there are special cases, where a child's sex develops in a disordered way at a chromosomal level or in their genitals. But in such cases, what we have is not a person of a third sex, or of no sex, but a deformed male or female. Obviously everything medically possible should be done to correct these bodily deformities, just as we do with other health problems. Gender dysphoria should not be used to create a protected class of persons, in which one's feeling override the facts of biology, or in which the rights, dignity, and privacy of transgender persons override the rights, dignity, and privacy of others. Thus, we claim for our churches and church members (in whatever vocation they serve) the right to reject compliance with any public policies or laws or that would require us to deny binary sexes, or to accept claims of gender identity that are contrary to one's God-assigned biology. We reject the legal redefinitions of sex and gender that divorce either of these realities from God-given biology. We claim the right to speak to people according to their God-given sex, rather than reinforcing gender dysphoric delusions by using alternative pronouns. We claim the right to restrict access to intimate facilities (e.g., bathrooms, nursing areas, shelters, etc.), to sex-specific events, etc., strictly according to God-given biological realities. The offices of pastor, elder, and deacon are open only to men, meaning biological men (1 Tim. 2:8-3:13). In the case of someone who has already transitioned to the appearance of the opposite sex, the session of the local congregation will determine the wisest and most compassionate course of action with regard to their participation in church life.

Summation: Forgiveness and Transformation in Christ

All sexual sins can be forgiven through the shed blood of Christ, including adultery and unlawful divorce, including lust and abortion, including the practice of homosexuality and transgenderism. But forgiveness can never be separated from confession and repentance; forgiveness can never be separated from denying oneself and taking up the cross daily; forgiveness can never be separated from fighting against sin and pursuing holiness in the power of the Holy Spirit. All our churches, related institutions, and members will seek to uphold and apply these policies.

(This document was prepared by Pastor Rich Lusk in August, 2018, for discussion by the session of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, AL, and the churches of Athanasius Presbytery [CREC])