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Preface

The following twelve statements address a number of issues, including:

1. the nature of sexual sin, temptation, and sanctified living in Christ,
2. whether or not a Christian should refer to himself or herself as a “gay Christian,”
3. whether or not we speak of a homosexual “orientation,” and
4. incorporating Christians into Christian community who have been attracted to the same sex;

all while giving special attention to parts of the Scripture (e.g., 1Corinthians 6) that are relevant to these topics.

These statements speak to two important tasks for the Church in our time:

1. to help pastors and elders shepherd those who are dealing with same-sex attraction, and
2. to suggest ways to articulate and defend a Biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding.

At the same time, the statements address two sets of fears:

1. that we will be harsh and unfeeling toward people who have been wounded and deeply hurt—and often by the Church. A hard-sounding stance toward them at this moment may only make it easier to discredit the Church in people’s minds. As a consequence, many are afraid that the Church will speak in ways that only support the powerful cultural narrative that orthodox Christian belief is toxic for hurting and struggling people;
2. that we will compromise at the very place where the world is attacking the Church in our culture. We see many professing Christians and whole denominations surrendering to the sexual revolution. We do not want to be one of them, nor even now in subtle ways to sow the seeds for some future compromise. As the natural family is a fundamental unit of human society and is the normal means of care and nurture, all sins which threaten, undermine, or marginalize it are both spiritually dangerous and detrimental to human flourishing.



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Part of the problem with regard to addressing these issues is that many of us are far more gripped with one set of fears than the other. But because both of the church's tasks are required, we should give each of them strong attention.

We must present "the whole Christ" when we both pastor individuals and speak to the world about sexuality and gender today. Jesus is full of grace and truth. In pastoral care we must not apply the truth so harshly as to be callously alienating or so indirectly that the truth is never clearly grasped.

Jesus is both the Holy One and the merciful one. He cleanses the temple yet eats with sinners. He gives Martha teaching on truth (John 11:25-26) yet he gives Mary only tears (John 11:35) even though they had both said the same thing to him about their grief (John 11:21, 32). He gives each of them what they most need at the moment. On the cross Jesus fulfills both the unyielding demands of the Law yet also the most wonderful purposes of God's love.

The following statements seek to capture this "grace and truth" wholeness as we address the issues. Each statement is dual, an associating of one truth with an accompanying truth or teaching. The paired truths help us avoid the opposite errors of either speaking the truth without love or trying to love someone without speaking the truth.

The path of grace and truth is not an easy one. Speaking the truth yet doing it in love is nearly always harder than separating these needed aspects of the whole gospel into two alternatives. We pray that the entire church may increasingly find that same "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

(Adapted from the Report of the Interim Committee on Human Sexuality to the Forty-Eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America 2019-2020)



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Statement 1: Marriage

We believe that marriage is to be between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:4-6).

Sexual intimacy is a gift from God to be cherished and is reserved for the marriage relationship between one man and one woman (Proverbs 5:18-19). Marriage was instituted by God for the mutual help and blessing of husband and wife, for procreation and the raising together of godly children, and to prevent sexual immorality (Genesis 1:28; 2:18; Malachi 2:14-15; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9).

Marriage is also a God-ordained picture of the differentiated relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:6-10). All other forms of sexual intimacy, including all forms of lust and same-sex sexual activity of any kind, are sinful (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 7).

Nevertheless, we do not believe that sexual intimacy in marriage automatically eliminates unwanted sexual desires, nor that all sex within marriage is sinless. We all stand in need of God's grace for sexual sin and temptation, whether married or not.

Moreover, sexual immorality is not an unpardonable sin. There is no sin so small it does not deserve damnation, and no sin so big it cannot be forgiven. There is hope and forgiveness for all who repent of their sin and put their trust in Christ (Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:35, 37; Acts 2:37-38; 16:30-31).

Statement 2: Image of God

We believe that God created human beings in his image as male and female (Genesis 1:26-27).

We recognize the goodness of the human body (Genesis 1:31; John 1:14) and the call to glorify God with our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). As a God of order and design, God opposes the confusion of man as woman and woman as man (1 Corinthians 11:14-15). While situations involving such confusion can be heartbreaking and complex, men and women should be helped to live in accordance with their biological sex.

Nevertheless, we ought to minister compassionately to those who are sincerely confused and disturbed by their internal sense of gender identity (Galatians 3:1; 2



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Timothy 2:24-26). We recognize that the effects of the Fall extend to the corruption of our whole nature, which may include how we think of our own gender and sexuality.

Moreover, some persons, in rare instances, may possess an objective medical condition in which their anatomical development may be ambiguous or does not match their genetic chromosomal sex. Such persons are also made in the image of God and should live out their biological sex, insofar as it can be known.

Statement 3: Original Sin

We believe that from the sin of our first parents we have received an inherited guilt and an inherited depravity (Romans 5:12-19; Ephesians 2:1-3).

From this original corruption—which is itself sinful and for which we are culpable—proceed all actual transgressions. All the outworkings of our corrupted nature (a corruption which remains, in part, even after regeneration) are truly and properly called sin.

Every sin, original and actual, and renders us liable to the wrath of God and deserving of death (Romans 3:23; James 2:10). We must repent of our sin in general and our particular sins, particularly. That is, we ought to grieve for our sin, hate our sin, turn from our sin unto God, and endeavor to walk with God in obedience to his commandments.

Nevertheless, God does not wish for believers to live in perpetual misery for their sins, each of which are pardoned and put to death in Christ. By the Spirit of Christ, we are able to make spiritual progress and to do good works, not perfectly, but truly. Even our imperfect works are made acceptable through Christ, and God is pleased to accept and reward them as pleasing in his sight.

Statement 4: Desire

We believe not only that our inclination toward sin is a result of the Fall, but that our fallen desires are in themselves sinful (Romans 6:11-12; 1 Peter 1:14; 2:11).

The desire for an illicit end—whether in sexual desire for a person of the same sex or in sexual desire disconnected from the context of Biblical marriage—is itself an illicit desire. Therefore, the experience of same-sex attraction is not morally neutral; the



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attraction is an expression of original or indwelling sin that must be repented of and put to death (Romans 8:13).

Nevertheless, we must celebrate that, despite the continuing presence of sinful desires (and even, at times, egregious sinful behavior), repentant, justified, and adopted believers are free from condemnation through the imputed righteousness of Christ (Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21) and are able to please God by walking in the Spirit (Romans 8:3-6).

Statement 5: Concupiscence

We believe that impure thoughts and desires which arise in us prior to and apart from a conscious act of the will are still sin.

We reject the Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence whereby disordered desires that afflict us due to the Fall do not become sin without a consenting act of the will. These desires within us are not mere weaknesses or inclinations to sin but are themselves idolatrous and sinful.

Nevertheless, we recognize that many persons who experience same-sex attraction describe their desires as arising in them unbidden and unwanted. We also recognize that the presence of same-sex attraction is often owing to many factors, which always include our own sin nature and may include being sinned against in the past.

As with any sinful pattern or propensity—which may include disordered desires, extramarital lust, pornographic addictions, and all abusive sexual behavior—the actions of others, though never finally determinative, can be significant and influential. This should move us to compassion and understanding. Moreover, it is true for all of us that sin can be both unchosen bondage and idolatrous rebellion at the same time. We all experience sin, at times, as a kind of voluntary servitude (Romans 7:13-20).

Statement 6: Temptation

We believe that Scripture speaks of temptation in different ways.

There are some temptations God gives us in the form of morally neutral trials, and other temptations God never gives us because they arise from within as morally illicit desires (James 1:2, 13-14). When temptations come from without, the temptation itself is not



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sin, unless we enter into the temptation. But when the temptation arises from within, it is our own act and is rightly called sin.

Nevertheless, there is an important degree of moral difference between temptation to sin and giving in to sin, even when the temptation is itself an expressing of indwelling sin. While our goal is the weakening and lessening of internal temptations to sin, Christians should feel their greatest responsibility not for the fact that such temptations occur but for thoroughly and immediately fleeing and resisting the temptations when they arise.

We can avoid “entering into” temptation by refusing to internally ponder and entertain the proposal and desire to actual sin. Without some distinction between (1) the illicit temptations that arise in us due to original sin and (2) the willful giving over to actual sin, Christians will be too discouraged to “make every effort” at growth in godliness and will feel like failures in their necessary efforts to be holy as God is holy (2 Peter 1:5-7; 1 Peter 1:14-16). God is pleased with our sincere obedience, even though it may be accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

Statement 7: Sanctification

We believe that Christians should flee immoral behavior and not yield to temptation.

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the ordinary means of grace, Christians should seek to wither, weaken, and put to death the underlying idolatries and sinful desires that lead to sinful behavior. The goal is not just consistent fleeing from, and regular resistance to, temptation, but the diminishment and even the end of the occurrences of sinful desires through the reordering of the loves of one’s heart toward Christ. Through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, we can make substantial progress in the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Romans 6:14-19; Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 4:4).

Nevertheless, this process of sanctification—even when the Christian is diligent and fervent in the application of the means of grace—will always be accompanied by many weaknesses and imperfections, with the Spirit and the flesh warring against one another until final glorification. The believer who struggles with same-sex attraction should expect to see the regenerate nature increasingly overcome the remaining corruption of the flesh, but this progress will often be slow and uneven. Moreover, the process of sanctification involves the whole person, not simply unwanted sexual desires.



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The aim of sanctification in one's sexual life cannot be reduced to attraction to persons of the opposite sex (though some persons may experience movement in this direction), but rather involves growing in grace and perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Statement 8: Impeccability

We affirm the impeccability of Christ.

The incarnate Son of God neither sinned (in thought, word, deed, or desire) nor had the possibility of sinning. Christ experienced temptation passively, in the form of trials and the devil's entreaties, not actively, in the form of disordered desires. Christ had only the suffering part of temptation, where we also have the sinning part. Christ had no inward disposition or inclination unto the least evil, being perfect in all graces and all their operations at all times.

Nevertheless, Christ endured, from without, real soul-wrenching temptations which qualified him to be our sympathetic high priest (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). Christ assumed a human nature that was susceptible to suffering and death. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

Statement 9: Identity

We affirm that the believer's most important identity is found in Christ (Romans 8:38-39; Ephesians 1:4, 7).

Christians ought to understand themselves, define themselves, and describe themselves in light of their union with Christ and their identity as regenerate, justified, holy children of God (Romans 6:5-11; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Ephesians 2:1-10). To hold identities rooted in sinful desires alongside the term "Christian" is inconsistent with Biblical language and undermines the spiritual reality that we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Nevertheless, being honest about our sin struggles is important. While Christians should not identify with their sin so as to embrace it or seek to base their identity on it, Christians ought to acknowledge their sin in an effort to overcome it.

There is a difference between speaking about a person's experienced sin-stained reality and employing the language of sinful desires as a personal identity marker. That is, we



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name our sins, but are not named by them. Moreover, we recognize that there are some secondary identities, when not rooted in sinful desires or struggles against the flesh, that can be legitimately affirmed along with our primary identity as Christians.

For example, the distinctions between male and female, or between various nationalities and people groups, are not eradicated in becoming Christians, but serve to magnify the glory of God in his plan of salvation (Genesis 1:27; 1 Peter 3:7; Revelation 5:9; 7:9-10).

Statement 10: Language

We affirm that we would be wise to avoid the term “gay Christian.”

Although the term “gay” may refer to more than being attracted to persons of the same sex, the term does not communicate less than that. For many people in our culture, to self-identify as “gay” suggests that one is engaged in homosexual practice. At the very least, the term normally communicates the presence and approval of same-sex sexual attraction as morally neutral or morally praiseworthy.

Even if “gay,” for some Christians, simply means “same-sex attraction,” it is still inappropriate to juxtapose this sinful desire, or any other sinful desire, as an identity marker alongside our identity as new creations in Christ.

Nevertheless, we recognize that some Christians may use the term “gay” in an effort to be more readily understood by non-Christians. The word “gay” is common in our culture, and we do not think it wise for churches to police every use of the term. Our burden is that we do not justify our sin struggles by affixing them to our identity as Christians.

Churches should be gentle, patient, and intentional with believers who call themselves “gay Christians,” encouraging them, as part of the process of sanctification, to leave behind identification language rooted in sinful desires, to live chaste lives, to refrain from entering into temptation, and to mortify their sinful desires.

Statement 11: Friendship

We affirm that our contemporary ecclesiastical culture has an underdeveloped understanding of friendship and often does not honor singleness as it should.



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The church must work to see that all members, including believers who struggle with same-sex attraction, are valued members of the body of Christ and engaged in meaningful relationships through the blessings of the family of God. Likewise, we affirm the value of Christians who share common struggles gathering together for mutual accountability, exhortation, and encouragement.

Nevertheless, we do not support the formation of exclusive, contractual marriage-like friendships, nor do we support same-sex romantic behavior or the assumption that certain sensibilities and interests are necessarily aspects of a gay identity. We do not consider same sex attraction a gift in itself, nor do we think this sin struggle, or any sin struggle, should be celebrated in the church.

Statement 12: Repentance and Hope

We affirm that the entire life of the believer is one of repentance.

Where we have mistreated those who struggle with same-sex attraction, or with any other sinful desires, we call ourselves to repentance. Where we have nurtured or made peace with sinful thoughts, desires, words, or deeds, we call ourselves to repentance. Where we have heaped upon others misplaced shame or have not dealt well with necessary God-given shame, we call ourselves to repentance.

Nevertheless, as we call ourselves to the evangelical grace of repentance, we see many reasons for rejoicing (Philippians 4:1). We give thanks for penitent believers who, though they continue to struggle with same-sex attraction, are living lives of chastity and obedience. These brothers and sisters can serve as courageous examples of faith and faithfulness, as they pursue Christ with a long obedience in gospel dependence.

We give thanks for the gospel that can save and transform the worst of sinners—older brothers and younger brothers, tax collectors and Pharisees, insiders, and outsiders. We rejoice in ten thousand spiritual blessings that are ours when we turn from sin by the power of the Spirit, trust in the promises of God, and rest upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life.