

Beliefs on Biblical Sexuality

This much is clear: we cannot and should not try to “get ourselves together” before we come to Christ—including in the area of our sexuality, which is becoming more confusing than ever before.

Jesus is looking for you as one looks for a lost son or daughter. Let Him find you. Fall into His arms. His love is fierce and trustworthy. Let Him redeem, restore, and define you. We bring our self, our sin, pain, confidence, preferences, and ideals to Him—the whole tangled ball—and He begins the process of transformation. Everyone who walks with Christ has been where you are, looking for faithful love and lasting truth. Our story is this: while we didn't want or like God, He reached for us and saved us. He is our King and Center, whose desire is that we experience the beauty, joy, and fullness of all that life in Him has to offer. We are happy to be His people and we gladly owe Him our lives.

To Start

You are beloved by the Lord. The pain, trauma, and injustices those in the LGBTQ community have experienced matter to God and to us. In both our private conversations and public discourse, we want to express the lovingkindness that God has for all people. Though some may disagree on what is best for individuals and society, and are often at odds over pieces of legislation, those who identify as LGBTQ can expect from Great Oaks Fellowship that every individual is important and valuable to us. Wherever we can be faithful to our convictions and still find common ground, that is our desire.

Scripture Contains the Meaning Life

The Bible is an identity book. We believe it tells us who God is, who we are, and what our purpose is. We believe that the God of the Bible is good and loving who wants the very best

for humanity—and He is that best. According to the Bible, we learn that God’s design for humans is that His creation would live in a deeply satisfying, perfect and loving connection with God and others. The Bible goes on to explain that humanity rebelled against God and because mankind desired to be their own God and not submit to God’s original plan, His design for mankind and creation was compromised because of sin. Each person ever born from that moment, became both victims and perpetrators of sin; no one was safe from each other and we couldn’t stop the ongoing destruction of our rebellion. The byproduct of being born into a broken world is that we become broken. But God had a plan to heal creation through His self-giving love. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him,” (John 3:16-17, NIV).

We have been saved by God’s grace, which is His unearned love for us and power to transform us. As we put our trust in Jesus, we die to self and become alive in Christ (Rom. 6:4). Believers are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)—a new person with a new identity, on a journey of becoming more and more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). By definition, a Christian is someone who is no better, or deserving than anyone else, who has been rescued from sin and its consequences by being washed (cleansed from sin and shame), sanctified (set apart from sin and shame and to the Lord), and justified (declared righteous by God)—all through Christ’s death and resurrection and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Knowing and being known by God in Christ is the meaning of life.

Male and Female Are Fundamental and Essential Distinctions

From the very beginning God has been socializing humanity, teaching us who we are, what our role is, and how to be just and good like Him. When He created the ancient society of the Jewish people, He gave them essential moral obligations concerning how to treat Him and each other—a foundation that would teach them to protect and thereby empower one another to thrive. Jesus interpreted and clarified the teachings of the Old Testament, and His instruction went beyond our actions to the very posture of our hearts. He taught us how to love God, ourselves, our neighbors, our bodies, and even our enemies. We seek to ground

our standards and view of humanity and sexuality in the nature of God, the teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the clarity of Scripture.

God, who according to Scripture is not a sexual being, revealed that He intentionally created humanity “in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27 NIV). The different, yet necessary and complementary natures of masculinity and femininity were necessary to reveal something about the nature of God. The egalitarian, non-hierarchical, communal necessity of the other beautifully illustrates the reality of God as one complex being—Son, Father, and Holy Spirit.

Though men’s and women’s bodies are highly similar in their various biological systems (like nervous, circulatory, digestive, etc.), men and women are different. Every nucleated cell—trillions of them in a human body—contains either a male or female sex chromosome set. Amazingly, every system of the male and female body functions perfectly and effectively independent of the other—except our reproductive systems. A man and a woman are essential in order to have children. Our “gender”—derived from the root “gen,” like the words generate, progeny, and genitals—points to our procreative organs. Male and female bodies have been created in such a way that future generations depend upon how our bodies complement each other. We therefore do not look to our desires, attractions, experiences, or inner world to find identity as male or female as a starting point; we look at biology. One may not like the starting point, or may wish it was different, but our chromosomal reality and anatomy at birth—which are not merely assigned, but observed and scientifically provable—are defining.

As an example, with the exception of intersex anomalies (disorders of sexual development), one’s inborn biology is the place every proposed reassignment surgery begins as it moves toward the desired result. No matter how many definitions are added to human identity, they are all variants, responses, or reactions to the two sexes. To articulate reality in other ways does not change this fundamental truth. Subjective viewpoints on gender fracture our ability to connect and communicate with one another and distort how we socialize our children. We believe that God knew exactly what He was doing when He created our sexuality and called it good. We seek to live in full agreement with His original design while advocating for respectful and excellent medical and emotional healthcare as appropriate

for the very small fraction of people born with disorders of sexual development and their parents.

Our Bodies Are for the Lord and the Lord Is for Our Bodies

God loves and values the human body. Not only did He design us male or female, but the incarnation (when God in Christ became flesh and blood) shows us that the body is central to the Lord's plan for creation. While never ceasing to be God, Jesus came to us as a human to present a living picture of God's image and will for humanity. And so, the incarnation powerfully tells us that God cherishes our physical bodies—enough that He would reveal Himself through one. Through the Cross and resurrection, Jesus' physical experience of life made a way for the restoration and healing of our physical bodies (Isa. 53). The Lord's Supper (called communion or the Eucharist) is a celebration of Christ giving His body for our transformation.

The believer's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), who brings healing, instruction, and communion with God. Paul rejected the popular idea in his day that the body wasn't a factor in spiritual wholeness so one could do whatever he or she wanted, or that it was a shameful hindrance to a desire to be pure. Just the opposite: the body is instrumental in our growth and maturity (1 Cor. 9:26-27) and we are destined to receive a glorified body upon our resurrection. Paul said it this way: "the body is...for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor. 6:13 NIV). Our bodies are a beautiful way of experiencing the Lord and glorifying Him. Through the incarnation and resurrection, Jesus has redeemed our body, soul, and spirit as an integrated whole that enables us to know God, others, and ourselves, and ultimately reveal and glorify Him.

Scripture Tells Us How to Think and Behave as Sexual Beings

Sex and sin are not synonymous. God made us sexual beings before sin was a factor. This was the blessing that He called "very good" (Gen. 1:31 NIV) and He has given us boundaries about how to express ourselves sexually. The Bible consistently addresses the complexity

of our sexuality as a result of our sin. God knows that the development of our sexuality is dependent on our family, community, and culture. Human sexuality has few natural limitations; one may act sexually with anyone or anything and in any setting if we are not socialized about what is healthy and expected. Knowing this, God has taught us His values.

As a model for all of humanity, God socialized Israel in the proper and healthy expression of sex. Just as any other pleasure in life, like rest, work, eating, or alcohol, sex can be wonderful or destructive. He had to teach Israel that sex with one's parents or children wasn't acceptable, nor was sex with someone else's spouse, sex with the same gender, sex for sale, sex in ritual worship, sex outside of marriage, sex with animals, sex in a group, and forcing sex on another—all were unacceptable to God, no matter how tempting or desirable. As we read this list, we may feel we have already embraced most of the Lord's ways or naturally complied to many of these boundaries, but they are all values we have learned. Humans didn't invent these guidelines in an evolutionary process or by imagining their ideal experience; rather they came from divine revelation. God taught us how to socialize one another and steward the gift of sex to create healthy people and societies.

The refusal to acknowledge and honor God leads to disconnection from reality. The lie that He doesn't exist, can't be known, has no rightful demands on us, and/or that we are not accountable to God creates a web of untruth in society as we invent new meanings for life and vie for power and pleasure. Our thoughts, emotions, and wills become distorted and unreliable guides in such a way that we worship created things rather than worshipping the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

God deeply values freedom because it is part of being made in His image and is necessary if we are to truly love and become like Christ. Worshipping things other than God eventually leads to lust—the enshrinement of desire as the focus of life—and it is idolatry. Eventually, lust enslaves people as they define themselves predominantly by their desires rather than God's heart and purpose. Instead of consistently intervening, He will allow individuals and societies to stubbornly experience sin's damaging effects—even to the point where it distorts their humanity (Rom. 1:24). God takes the gifts of free will and love very seriously and will not coerce devotion.

The multitude of possible gender identities and the normalization of same-sex sexual

behavior points to a society that has abandoned the desire to accurately define and socialize humanity as a reflection of God's image—humanity created as male and female, alike but different, who produce offspring of like kind (Gen. 1:26-28). They have suppressed and distorted something built into the fabric of creation, and this is not healthy (Rom. 1:21-23). For the sake of respect and communication throughout this statement, we have referenced “LGBTQ”; but these labels merely describe a subjective and often fluid experience that belies the objective truth of our male and female biology.

Jesus Speaks to Questions on Sex, Gender, Singleness, and Marriage

Jesus teaches His followers a sexual ethic that is fundamentally different from modern society—that we are more than our desires, questioning, or attractions. In Matthew 19:4-6 NIV, He reaffirmed the Genesis 1 view of sex, gender, and marriage:

“Haven't you read,” He replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Twice Jesus added “two” to His quote of Genesis 2:24, emphasizing the truth that marriage was always intended to be a lifetime covenant between one man and one woman, and the only context in which sexual behavior is blessed. (He was actually arguing against divorce and remarriage in the passage.) The only other path Jesus advocated was to remain single and celibate (Mat. 19:10-12). Jesus believed this to be a calling, knowing that most would marry. Paul speaks of a gift (a grace from God) to be married or single. Jesus and Paul themselves were both fulfilled, celibate, sexual beings who lived in deep connection with others and “raised” families of believers (Mat. 12:46-50; 1 Cor. 4:15).

Even more profoundly, Jesus expected His followers to not cultivate lust (Mat. 5:28)—to not treat themselves and others as less than human or mere objects of sexual gratification. We monetize and normalize lust; He forbade it. Desire is normal and healthy; lust is self-

medicating and destructive. Lust's manifestations—human trafficking, porn, the “hook-up” culture, and more—destroy respect, intimacy, and bonding. Other people are seen as something to be collected, possessed, consumed, and discarded. But Jesus is creating an extended family of nobility and safety, where people resist sexualizing each other, where they protect each other, and where sex is a part of life but not the meaning or the center of it. Current culture—built on self, money, and power—may not embrace this, but believers choose everyday to trust and follow Him as He changes us and the world one person at a time.

We acknowledge that we and the greater global Church have often failed to live up to this standard and followed the heart and teaching of Jesus in creating safe and noble communities. The Church has often behaved hypocritically, or acted as though none of us fail or struggle in these areas, and we seek forgiveness and grace to grow and embrace the standard Christ has called us to.

Freedom with Jesus

Jesus consistently saw the beauty and worth in people, regardless of how society, religious elites, and influencers perceived them. His words instilled an awareness of personal dignity and self-worth that caused people to marvel over who God is and who they were to Him. He modeled perfect love and unflinching truth. To the humble He was kind, to the proud He was fierce; He did whatever love demanded to move the human heart to think like God does. His compassion, truth, death, and resurrection changed the world. No one was more loving and kind than Jesus. He had people in process around Him, and wasn't intimidated by their histories or ongoing struggles. He never required people to have it all together in order to follow Him, and He knew that His followers would take time to grow and become more like Him along the way. His grace draws us into a new way of living, sometimes all at once and other times, step-by-step.

As Christians, we spend our entire lives discovering the beauty of Jesus, increasingly finding that no cost is too great to be fully engaged in His presence. We learn to surrender and grow, prioritizing connection to Him. Even though we face challenges and temptations, God promises to help us overcome if we will trust and keep following Him (1 Cor. 10:13).

Some people experience same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria, including some in our church community—not because they were “born that way,” but because they were born human into a fallen world, and because society has disrupted and confused how we teach children who they are. But we remind ourselves that human beings are more than their socialization and desires. It’s important for us to remember that these are not new issues. Paul had to teach new Gentile believers of the Roman empire a radically different sexual identity and ethic than the dehumanizing one of their society. As we are learning Jesus’ ethic, we may stumble, but we do not reach for shame, punishment, or self-condemnation. Instead, we reach for grace because He is faithful and experienced temptation just as we do (Heb. 4:15). In all areas of life, we are on a journey of giving our whole lives to Jesus—our victories and failures—so that we can walk in His freedom, hope, and peace. We trade in the old labels and identities that we have applied to ourselves, and joyfully receive a new identity as His sons or daughters (John 1:12).

We believe that God designed us with a free will and deeply values our ability to respond to His invitation. Jesus never forced people to follow Him or punished them into change, but invited them to enter into a new way of life. As His followers, we are called to treat all people in the same way, with the utmost respect, dignity, compassion, and love, even while adamantly disagreeing with them. We therefore reject any and all forms of physical violence, force, manipulation, shame, or humiliation in any kind of therapy as ineffective and abusive. These are remnants of what the Bible condemns as “self-made religion...and severity to the body,” yet they “are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh,” (Col. 2:23 ESV).

Instead, we listen. We ask questions. We share our stories. We love each other. We embrace freedom and voluntary growth. We create an environment of authenticity and grace where all people can pursue and receive the freedom that Jesus died to give us. We strongly advocate for safe and fair access to resources that will assist people in their personal journeys as they navigate their self-understanding including: religious and secular counseling, biblical teaching, loving parents and guardians who are empowered to have meaningful conversation and influence, wise teachers, role models and mentors, respectful intellectual conversation, and healthy communities where all individuals can find safe places to discuss these sacred issues of faith, identity, human sexuality, and culture. God uses these pathways of connection to make us whole.

There are many brothers and sisters in the Church who have identified as LGBTQ who, with the sort of freedom and interactions mentioned above, no longer understand themselves in those terms. It is as inappropriate and disrespectful to discount their journeys as it would be to discount someone's experience of leaving the Church and embracing LGBTQ identity and ideology. It is possible to move into and out of LGBTQ identifications, and therefore freedom and access to resources should be protected, even if that outcome is to never again identify as LGBTQ.

Conclusion

As we pray that God's Kingdom comes to earth and that His will is done, we understand His power is at work enabling us to experience something of our completely redeemed future that is described in Jesus' teaching. Here at Great Oaks Fellowship we contend together for the fullness of heaven to manifest among us, and so we are seeing bodies healed, families restored, and broken hearts made whole. We serve a God for whom nothing is impossible and whose power draws us into His wonderful righteousness.

God loves and accepts all people as they are as they come to Him, and invites them to experience the wonder of His Kingdom and the extravagance of His transformative love. Therefore, He draws us to embrace a new life offered through Jesus so that we may please Him and enjoy Him forever. We mustn't hold onto our fallen and unredeemed identity when God is offering more than we could ever ask for or even imagine—even redemption of our sexuality according to His Word.

Let us come to Him together as one unified body and celebrate the Lord's unfolding redemption by declaring together, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Mat. 6:10 NIV).