

EPC General Assembly Vote on Same Sex Attraction

Dr. Brad Strait, CCPC Sunday, July 12, 2026

A. We live in the midst of a clash of world views.

As we have said previously, our culture increasingly presents homosexuality as a normal and celebrated aspect of human identity. Those who disagree are most often viewed as intolerant or out of step with contemporary society. Nevertheless, the EPC affirms the full authority of Scripture and seeks to speak both truthfully and compassionately. We believe that homosexual behavior, same-sex marriage, and all sexual activity outside God's design for marriage between one man and one woman are contrary to Scripture and sinful. The western, progressive world sees this as completely crazy and inappropriate. Homosexuality has become a highly charged, emotional issue.

This creates a cultural warzone where we, in the EPC and as biblical Christians, are fighting against great pressure from a liberalized, non-Christian culture. It is at its core a clash of worldviews. And, horribly, this has infected the liberal modern church. And our discussions. Even as we stand for our biblical convictions, Jesus has called us to love our neighbors, extend the grace of Christ to all people, and avoid making claims beyond what Scripture itself teaches. We are to love those who sin, while hating the sin.

B. The main discussion at this year's GA was about homosexuality.

The primary issue at General Assembly was a discussion on Same Sex Attraction and Ordination standards for pastors, elders, and deacons. In the main points, everyone agrees 99% on these standards for ordination in the EPC:

Homosexual practice, same-sex marriage, the affirmation of a LGBT+ homosexual identity or involvement, and all lustful passions toward same-sex persons (and toward anyone outside a male-female marriage) remain clearly sin and so must be incompatible with ordained office in the EPC.

This was not up for debate nor discussed. Period.

At the 46th General Assembly a few weeks ago, we affirmed these convictions. As well, we voted on three motions on human sexuality, as presented by an Ad Interim Committee who had been asked in 2024 to research the issues and come back to GA with recommendations. After much debate, the majority of the EPC, with the CCPC Session, approved these documents. We believe the evidence is that the EPC is not weakening its commitment to biblical sexual ethics or opening the door to the acceptance of homosexual practice.

Recognizing that our current Book of Government (our binding constitution) did not mention homosexuality or same-sex attraction but covered the qualifications for officer ordination more broadly, at this year's GA the ordination standards were considerably clarified and strengthened. **Language was added as below:**

Whether single or married, officers must conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity (see Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 138-139) in their descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character, and conduct. (BOG G.9-3 as attached)*

WCLC 138-139 (also attached) make sexual purity an ongoing standard for ordination of all officers, and forbid the ordination of someone involved in homosexual acts, adultery, sexual relationships outside of marriage, all sexual desires and others ungodly behavior. We also approved several sections adding this language for all ordination candidates:

They...shall relate experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord, and steady progress in spiritual growth.

C. Same Sex Attraction

The friction at the Assembly was specifically about the 1% of the SSA issue we disagreed about:

Given that homosexual conduct and identity are disqualifying for ordination, should our Book of Government also require that any temptation of same-sex attraction (SSA) or any history of SSA temptation, automatically disqualify a candidate from serving as a Deacon, Elder, or Pastor forever?

Faithful EPC leaders have reached different conclusions regarding this question of SSA temptation and history. This was the most significant discussion at GA, covering almost 6 hours of study, prayer, and points of view. Some at Ga believed the AIC report faithfully applied biblical teaching regarding temptation, sanctification, and ordination.

Others believed same-sex attraction should be treated differently from other forms of temptation and should itself disqualify a candidate from office. They saw homosexual sin as a kind of “unnatural super-sin,” to the end that a confession of any SSA experience or temptation toward homosexuality would be always exclusionary from office. They presented alternate wording for each proposal. Those holding belief hung on several theological questions (as I mentioned in an earlier letter):

This became the dividing point: from Romans 1 and other passages, is homosexuality uniquely evil or categorically different from other sins?

The majority of the GA and our Session believe the biblical answer is no. Homosexual behavior is clearly sinful and carries serious consequences, but Scripture rarely treats it in isolation. In Romans 1 and elsewhere it appears alongside many other sins flowing from humanity's rebellion against God. While homosexual acts are specifically called “an abomination,” Scripture applies “abomination” to other sins including idolatry, pride, dishonest business practices, false religion, child sacrifice, incest, adultery, and other violations of God's moral law. Creating a separate standard based on one sin does not seem to conform to Scripture.

A second question also arose: from James 1 and other verses, is the temptation (whether resisted or not) toward a sin in itself a sin, and so disqualifying for ordination?

The majority of the GA and our Session believe Scripture distinguishes temptation from sin. Homosexual acts are clearly identified as sin. In the Bible, James 1 describes a progression from temptation and

desire to the conception and birth of sin. Jesus Himself was tempted “in every respect as we are,” yet without sin. Temptation alone is therefore not identical to sin, although sinful desires, lust, and fantasies must be resisted and mortified. The approved pastoral letter reflects this distinction by requiring officers to affirm the sinfulness of fallen desires and to pursue Spirit-empowered victory over sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions. While we believe God can and is changing us, the process is lifelong. We know that people with a history of homosexuality were included in the early church (see 1 Corinthians 6:9–11), and that God’s grace through faith in Jesus is sufficient to cover all sins, including grievous sexual ones.

The AIC recommended changes were approved as a change to our constitution (which now must be approved over the last year by 75% of our Presbyteries), about 65% to 35%. The majority of the commissioners believed the Book of Government changes actually strengthen our position against the ordination of a homosexual pastor. This Pastoral Letter (a non-binding set of helps for churches and pastors facing this issue) was approved at GA by about 65% to 35%. This affirmed that homosexual behavior and identity are always disqualifying, but that temptation alone is not necessarily sin and therefore is not automatically disqualifying. Instead, Sessions and Presbyteries are instructed to examine candidates carefully for evidence of ongoing sexual immorality, unrepentant lust, disordered desires, or patterns of behavior inconsistent with biblical chastity. Candidates who acknowledge SSA must demonstrate a sustained pattern of holiness in their identity, conduct, desires, and attitudes. Celibacy is not the standard; a long-term change of heart and patterns is required.

In The AIC report was presented for discussion and a vote. Differing perspectives were discussed and debated at General Assembly. About two thirds of the GA voted for the AIC reports. Overall, the discussion was marked by biblical conviction, humility, charity, and mutual respect. Please join me in praying that God will continue to shape us into the image of Jesus through this process and keep us faithful to his Word.

Pastor Brad

Key Questions

As we discuss this issue at General Assembly regarding the ordination of deacons, elders, and pastors, four questions come to the forefront:

Question 1: From Romans 1 and other passages, is homosexuality uniquely evil or categorically different from other sins?

We believe the biblical answer is no. Homosexual behavior is clearly sinful and carries serious consequences, but Scripture rarely treats it in isolation. In Romans 1 and elsewhere it appears alongside many other sins flowing from humanity's rebellion against God. While homosexual acts are specifically called an abomination, Scripture applies similar language to other sins including idolatry, pride, dishonest business practices, false religion, child sacrifice, incest, adultery, and other violations of God's moral law. Creating a separate standard based on one sin does not seem to conform to Scripture.

Question 2: From James 1 and other verses, is the temptation toward homosexuality itself a sin?

We believe Scripture distinguishes temptation from sin. Homosexual acts are clearly identified as sin. James 1 describes a progression from temptation and desire to the conception and birth of sin. Jesus

Himself was tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin. Temptation alone is therefore not identical to sin, although sinful desires, lust, and fantasies must be resisted and mortified. The AIC report reflects this distinction by requiring officers to affirm the sinfulness of fallen desires and to pursue Spirit-empowered victory over sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions. While we believe God can and is changing us, the process is lifelong.

Question 3: When will humanity, including the church and its leaders, finally be free from its sinful nature and temptation?

Temptation is a part of life until Christ glorifies us. Scripture and the Westminster Confession teach that sin remains in every believer throughout this life. Every Christian, including pastors and elders, faces temptation. Our responsibility is to identify it, resist it, and flee from it. The AIC Pastoral Letter therefore requires examination of candidates concerning their identity in Christ, their views on homosexual desire and practice, their experience of God's transforming grace, their ability to counsel others struggling with sexual sin, and their rationale for serving as officers while experiencing SSA temptations.

Question 4: Isn't this similar to the liberalization that occurred in the PCUSA and other mainline denominations?

No. The concern is understandable, but the situations are fundamentally different. The PCUSA (and other mainline groups) eventually removed biblical prohibitions against homosexual practice only after weakening confidence in Scripture as a binding authority over many, many years. Over time they questioned the Bible's certainty, weakened the Resurrection as a real event, reduced the exceptional nature of Jesus to save, redefined sin and judgment, abandoned fidelity and chastity standards, adopted broad local-option approaches to sexuality, and ultimately redefined marriage and ordination.

The AIC documents move in the opposite direction. They explicitly take a biblical stand to:

- Call homosexual conduct sinful.
- Call same-sex marriage sinful.
- Call same-sex sexual desires sinful.
- Require officers to affirm the sinfulness of fallen desires.
- Discourage "gay Christian" identity language.
- Require chastity in identity, behavior, desires, and attitudes.

FOR DEEPER STUDY Evangelical Scholars Affirming the Above Answers

Keller, Tim

Bio: Presbyterian pastor and author known for gospel-centered preaching and cultural apologetics.

- “Romans 1 is not about ‘those people out there’—it is about what happens to all of us when we turn from God.” - *Romans 1–7 For You* (2014).
- “To be tempted is not the same as to sin. Sin begins when we consent to the desire and build our identity around it.” - Sermon on *James 1*.

Stott, John

Bio: British evangelical pastor and influential expositor of Romans.

- “The purpose of Romans 1 is not to encourage us to condemn others, but to prepare us to recognize our own sin.” - *The Message of Romans*.

Begg, Alistair

Bio: Scottish evangelical pastor and longtime Bible teacher at *Truth for Life* and Parkside Church.

- “We are not defined by our temptations, but by our response to them and by the grace of God in Christ.” - Truth For Life sermon on Romans 1, “God Gave Them Over, Part 1.”
- “The danger is that we read Romans 1 and immediately think of other people, instead of recognizing that Paul is building a case that will include us all.” -Truth For Life, “God Gave Them Up — Part Two.”

Graham, Billy

Bio: (1918-2018) Graham was the most influential evangelical evangelist of the twentieth century.

- “I think that the Bible teaches that homosexuality is a sin, but the Bible also teaches that pride is a sin, jealousy is a sin, and hate is a sin, evil thoughts are a sin. So I don't think that homosexuality should be chosen as the overwhelming sin that we're all talking about.” - Billy Graham Evangelic Association, *On Homosexuality*
- “As long as we live, we'll never be completely free from the temptation to do wrong. As we grow older, our temptations may change — but they'll always be there, seeking to lure us into their trap... When temptations come, don't dwell on them but flee from them, and ask Christ to help you by His Spirit. Learn to avoid situations (and people) that you know will tempt you.” – BGEA, *Answers about Temptation*.

Moo, Douglas

Bio: Evangelical New Testament scholar and author of the NICNT commentary on Romans.

- “Paul's point is not to isolate one sin but to show the consequences of rejecting God in a particularly vivid way.” -*The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT.

Packer, J.I.

Bio: Anglican theologian and author of *Knowing God* and *Concise Theology*.

- “Scripture diagnoses sin as a universal deformity of human nature, found at every point in every person.” - *Concise Theology*.

Calvin, John

Bio: French Reformer and major theologian of the Protestant Reformation.

- “Paul... shows that all are under sin, that none may exempt themselves, but that the whole human race is guilty before God.” - *Commentaries on Romans*.
- “We are tempted by evil thoughts, but we do not sin unless the will consents.” - *Commentaries on James 1*.

Lloyd-Jones, Martin

Bio: (1899-1981) one of the most influential Reformed preachers of the twentieth century.

- The object of the Apostle is not merely to condemn certain particular sins, but to show that the whole world is guilty before God.” — *Romans 1 Sermon*
- “The Christian is not a man who has no sin; he is a man who is no longer controlled by sin ... The believer still feels the power of sin within, but he is no longer under its dominion.” — *Romans 6: The New Man*
- “Temptation is not sin. Our Lord was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” - *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*

Blomberg, Craig

Bio: Evangelical New Testament scholar and professor known for work on hermeneutics and ethics.

- “Paul does not single out homosexual behavior as the worst of sins, but includes it among many manifestations of humanity’s fallen condition.” - *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*.

Owen, John

Bio: English Puritan theologian known for writings on indwelling sin and sanctification.

- “Temptation in itself is no sin; it is the yielding unto it wherein the sin lies.” - *Of Temptation, Works*, vol. 6.
- “Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world ... There is no man that sins in any one kind, but he would sin in all kinds if left unto himself.” -” - *Mortification of Sin*.

Spurgeon, Charles Haddon

- “The Savior could be tempted, yet there was no sin in Him. Temptation does not necessarily imply sin.” - Sermon on Hebrews 4:15, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*.

Sproul, R.C.

- “The problem is not merely that people commit sins; the problem is that humanity is fallen at its core.” -Teaching series on Romans and original sin, *Ligonier Ministries*
- “Paul’s purpose is not to isolate one class of sinners but to show that the whole world stands guilty before God.” - Romans lectures, *Ligonier Ministries*.

DeYoung, Kevin

Bio: Reformed pastor, author, and theologian in the Presbyterian Church in America.

- “The Bible is consistent in teaching that homosexual behavior is sin, but it is not singled out as the worst sin.” - *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*
- “Scripture speaks most clearly about behavior, but our desires are not morally neutral.” - *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*

Edwards, Jonathan

Bio: American theologian and revival preacher of the First Great Awakening.

- “The essence of all sin consists in the creature’s forsaking God and setting up himself in His stead...It is common to us all.” - *The Nature of True Virtue*.

Boston, Thomas

Bio: Scottish Puritan pastor and theologian associated with Reformed theology.

- “All mankind being fallen in Adam, the corruption of nature hath spread itself through the whole man...There is no sin, but what is in the root of our nature.”
- *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*.

MacArthur, John

Bio: Pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church and founder of Grace to You. One of the most influential expository preachers in contemporary evangelicalism,

- “Paul is not isolating one sin but describing the downward spiral of a society that has rejected God.” — *GTY Romans 1 sermon*.
- “Sanctification is the lifelong process by which the Spirit progressively weakens the power of sin in the believer.” — *The Gospel According to Jesus*

JC Ryle

- “The corruption of human nature is no slight blemish, but a thorough disease which affects every part of us.... The seeds of every sin are latent in every human heart, and remain until we are glorified.” -*Holiness* (1877).

Piper, John

Bio: Baptist pastor and founder of Desiring God ministries.

- “Homosexuality as a practice is not in a class by itself in the New Testament.”
- Desiring God, “*Was Christopher Broussard Right?*”
- “Homosexual behavior is one expression of the fallen condition Paul describes.”
- Desiring God, sermon on *Romans 1*.
- “Homosexuality is not the unforgivable sin... the blood of Jesus covers all sins for those who repent and believe.” - Sermon on *Homosexuality and The Gospel*.

Gagnon, Robert

Bio: New Testament professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary specializing in biblical sexual ethics.

- “Temptation to engage in homosexual practice is not itself the same thing as engaging in homosexual practice.” - *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*.
- “The point of Romans 1 is not to suggest that homosexual offenders are uniquely sinful, but to illustrate how humanity’s rebellion against God manifests itself.” - *ibid*.

Morris, Leon

Bio: Evangelical Retired Principal of Ridley college in (Melbourne, Australia) and author of the Pillar New Testament commentary on Romans.

- “ But here [Paul] is not trying to picture the total scene. He is pursuing his theological purpose of showing that all people are sinners. In pursuit of this aim, he concentrates on that part of the picture which is relevant.... It is Paul’s purpose to show that [sin] exists, and that it exists universally. Wherever pagans are to be found, the kinds of sin of which he speaks will be found also...homosexuality functions as the best illustration of that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. Idolatry is “unnatural” in the sense that it is contrary to God’s intention for human beings. To worship corruptible animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God is to turn the created order upside down. In the sexual sphere the mirror image of this “unnatural” choice of idolatry is homosexuality. – *Romans*, Pillar Commentary.

Schreiner, Thomas

Bio: Southern Baptist New Testament scholar and author of the BECNT Romans commentary.

- “Homosexual behavior is not singled out because it is the worst sin, but because it clearly illustrates the exchange of the created order. The sins listed in Romans 1 are symptoms of a deeper problem—the rejection of God.” - Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT.

Human¹ Sexuality

In a time when views of human sexuality and marriage are rapidly changing, we believe it is necessary and helpful to state clearly and compassionately to the Church and the world our beliefs about God's design for human sexuality. We wish to do so with love toward all as we attempt to imitate God's love for us.¹ We long for the Church as well as society to conform to biblical standards of sexuality; but our ultimate desire is that, through the gospel, all may come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives and receive His gift of eternal life. We also know that, having come to believe in Him, we enjoy His blessing by walking with Him according to His Word. We believe the Bible to be God's Word and that to understand and obey His will leads to the greatest human flourishing.² What follows is what we believe the Scriptures teach and the Christian Church has held to be true since the time of the apostles, and what therefore holds the greatest prospects for human happiness and well-being, even as we strive and long for a time when God will make all things new.³

The Divine Origin and Purpose of Human Sexuality

All men and women are made in the image of God and human sexuality is a gift from God. The Scriptures present a grand vision of husband and wife who are to have intimate fellowship through union with a covenant partner who is both similar (human) and different (opposite sex) leading to fruitful procreation of humanity. In this profound mystery, we discover God's purposes for our sexuality and how He wills it to be expressed in our union and communion with Him.⁴

The fall of humankind, recorded in Genesis 3, corrupted our natures, and this corrupted nature made us utterly indisposed, disabled, opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.⁵ We began to distort and misuse the gifts of God to our own demise and entered into the conditions of sin and misery: we desire the good things the wrong way and also desire wrong things. All of our sinful transgressions emerge from this corrupted nature, and this corruption of our hearts, along with all its impulses, is itself sin.⁶ The Fall also broke our world and everything in it, including our relationships, bodies, and affections, such that we suffer by facing many temptations to sin.⁷

Therefore, because God made us and redeems us, He alone has sovereign authority to define us and to regulate the right ordering of our desires and our sexual practice, and empowers us to align with His good will. Our Father does this through the gracious redemptive work of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the provision of His Holy Spirit, by which He leads us from brokenness and rebellion to a full and beautiful restoration of our

¹ John 4:10; John 15:12; 1 John 3:10; Ephesians 5:1-2

² Psalm 1; Matthew 4:4

³ Revelation 21:5

⁴ Genesis 2:18-25; Song of Songs; Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

⁵ Genesis 6:5; 8:21; John 3:6; Romans 3:10-19; 5:6; 7:18; 8:7; Colossians 1:21; Westminster Confession of Faith 6.3-4; Westminster Larger Catechism 28

⁶ Matthew 15:19; Ephesians 2:2-3; James 1:14; Westminster Confession of Faith 6.4-5

⁷ Westminster Confession of Faith 6.6; Westminster Larger Catechism 23; 27-28

relationship with Him and of our human dignity and purpose.⁸ In our union with Christ, our transgressions are pardoned, our corrupted nature is being mortified, and we are enabled by His Spirit to recognize and confess our sins, repent, mortify sin, and flee temptation.⁹ We enjoy now a taste of the consummation for God's purpose: the experience of union and communion with God through the redemption of Jesus and indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the children of the Father. This present inbreaking of the kingdom of God means that the restoration from our condition of sin includes not only an affirmation of marriage and sex, but also the validation of the single life. Redeemed sexuality is grounded in God's good creation and looks forward to its eschatological consummation.

Until Christ returns, the corrupt nature remains in the regenerate during this life and while pardoned, the corruption itself and all motions proceeding from it remain truly and properly sin. Temptation is not in itself sin nor is desire — temptation is an appeal to desire, to grasp a desire and lay hold of it by sinful means.¹⁰ We, therefore, must continually repent of our sin, resist every temptation, and renounce every attempt and desire to subvert God's purposes and His commandments concerning our sexuality. We must repent of our corrupted hearts, sinful lusts, and indulging temptation. We have been made alive in Christ by His Spirit and must keep in step with Him to mortify the passions of the flesh and grow in holiness. We acknowledge that any sexual desires apart from God's design for marriage are sinful, arise from our sinfully corrupted nature, and we must repent of them all. We also acknowledge that any temptations to fulfill sexual desire apart from God's design for marriage must be resisted, regardless of how persistent or seemingly innate the temptation or desire is.

Confession of Sin

We, as evangelical Presbyterians, readily and sorrowfully confess our manifold violations of His Word: as a people, we have engaged in premarital sex, adultery, ungodly divorce, and sexual lusts of every sort, not only before coming to faith in Christ, but also afterward. As churches, we have at times sanctioned unbiblical marriages, violating the expressed will of God revealed in the Scriptures; and we sometimes have self-righteously condemned others for their sexual sins while committing our own. We stand in need of God's forgiveness and power to live holy lives. Our churches desperately need revival and a humble return to godly sexual practice. And so, with humble and repentant hearts, we return to the Lord, and we invite those both inside and outside the Church to join us in seeking God's blessing in our sexual lives.¹¹

We believe that the fundamental problems with most contemporary views of sexuality are, first, that the focus is limited to individual pleasure, relational intimacy, and selffulfillment; second, that biblical marriage is rejected as the exclusive context for sexual intimacy. While the Scriptures teach that human sexuality is indeed a gift for our¹²¹³¹⁴ enjoyment, its primary purpose is to glorify God.¹² Whether young or old, male or female, single or married, all humans

⁸ John 10:10; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-8

⁹ Psalm 1; Matthew 4:4

¹⁰ James 1:14-15

¹¹ Psalm 85:4-7; Matthew 7:4-5; Acts 3:19-20

¹² Corinthians 6:20; 10:31; Philippians 1:20

¹³ Corinthians 6:9-10; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 4:17; Revelation 21:8; 22:15

¹⁴ Corinthians 7:8, 32-35

are obligated to glorify our Creator in our sexuality through faithful conformity to God's design as revealed in the Scriptures.

We desire to adhere fully to biblical sexuality. Out of love we remind ourselves and share with others the message of God's judgment upon all forms of sexual immorality.¹³ We also believe that there is no place for any form of cruelty, hate or denigration of those who either disagree with these positions or hold to other positions. We unequivocally condemn all injustices, sinful intimidation, and physical violence perpetrated against anyone because of sexual attraction or practice.

The Single Life

The New Testament commends the single life.¹⁴ As followers of Jesus, we are bound in spiritual union with Him as Bridegroom, in Whom we are to be complete and content.¹⁵ By expressing our maleness or femaleness, even apart from romantic relationships, we enrich human community and contribute to the well-being of society. Single men and women are also given the opportunity to serve the Lord with undivided devotion. They are free, in a particular way, to dedicate their entire lives to the Lord and find their greatest fulfillment in pleasing Him. This was true for our Lord Jesus and for the Apostle Paul, who exemplified and elevated the godly single life. God intends both married and single men and women to live in vibrant community together, rather than isolation and loneliness. In this sacred community of deep and committed friendships, we encourage single persons to live out loving, holy, celibate lives. We, in the EPC, encourage all our churches to nurture holy and missional community among and with single members.

The Married Life

When God created us male and female, He also instituted the ordinance of marriage in which one man and one woman are bound together for life in a solemn covenant, which beautifully illustrates God's covenantal relationship with His chosen people.¹⁶ God's design for marriage and sex in creation is affirmed by Christ. God directs His people who marry to wed only fellow believers—those who trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and have joined His Church.¹⁷ It is within the covenant of marriage alone that God—for His own glory, the mutual encouragement of the spouses, procreation, the strengthening of the family, and the welfare of humankind—has instructed husbands and wives to engage in regular, intimate sexual love.¹⁸ In this uniquely sexual relationship, the married couple seeks to remember, celebrate, and model Christ's love for His Church and His Church's devotion to her Lord and to serve one another with godly affection.¹⁹

A Call to Holiness

We believe God has called us to live holy lives.^{20,21} The Christian believer's body is a temple of God's Spirit;²¹ therefore rather than stealing sexual privileges from one another outside of

¹⁵ John 15:5; Ephesians 5:25, 32; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

¹⁶ Genesis 2:23-25; Isaiah 61:10-62:5; Matthew 19:3-12

¹⁷ Malachi 2:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14

¹⁸ Proverbs 5:18-21; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

¹⁹ Ephesians 5:25-33

²⁰ Hebrews 12:14; Ephesians 5:3-5

²¹ Corinthians 6:18-20

marriage, we are called to edify one another in multiple ways that we may all become more like Christ. Those who are married must avoid every temptation that would diminish the loving faithfulness they vowed in their marriage covenant. Those who are unmarried must seek to honor God through diligently avoiding temptation, restraining ungodly sexual impulses, focusing their energies on serving Christ and neighbor, and eagerly anticipating the new heavens and the new earth, when all things will be restored and every godly human longing beautifully fulfilled.²² Those who find themselves desiring to be a person of the opposite sex or gender face painful emotions and weighty consequences. With heartfelt sympathy and a deep desire to love and encourage them in their circumstances, we believe all people must find their contentment in Christ alone, accepting His wise and gracious providence, and looking to Him for strength to glorify Him and to serve his or her neighbor through the sex given at conception.²³

It is encouraging to remember that our Lord Jesus suffered every human temptation without sinning.^{24,25} Extended seasons of bodily weakness and sexual temptation may weaken our sense of God's grace and assurance of salvation, yet God's Spirit never abandons his children, and our Father always provides His people a way of escape from every sin.²⁵ Unrepentant sinful behavior is incompatible with the confession of Jesus as Lord required of all members of the EPC. Additionally, it is required of ordained officers in the EPC that they believe, practice, and teach the moral standards contained in the Scriptures and Constitution of the EPC and reflected in this position paper.

Recovering from Sexual Brokenness

Because of universal human corruption emanating from the fall of Adam and Eve, we are all broken sexually in one or more ways and to varying degrees.²⁶ We have all sinned and we all live in a world full of sin and temptation. We have been saved by the sheer grace of God in Christ. Therefore, while we call upon fellow sinners everywhere to repent of their sins,²⁶ we must do so in a spirit of gentleness,^{27,28} acknowledging it is right and good for us to live in continual personal and corporate repentance, humbly seeking God's help for ourselves and for our neighbor.²⁹ Through faith in the crucified and resurrected Jesus, we are forgiven all our sexual sins, washed from their impurity, and given the power of the Holy Spirit to live lives worthy of the gospel setting an example for the watching world and inviting them to join us in walking with Jesus.²⁹

Those in and out of the Church struggling with various forms of sexual disorientation or gender dysphoria should find God's people ready to walk lovingly with them in their struggles and to invite them to join us in following the Lord. Together as a people, we must all seek healing for our own lives and for each other's lives, discovering what it means to be godly men and women in the

²² Psalm 16:11; Revelation 19:6-9

²³ We understand that in rare cases, physiological gender ambiguity at birth calls for special care and wisdom.

²⁴ Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15-16

²⁵ Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 2:12-13; Westminster Larger Catechism 81 ²⁶ Romans 3:22b-23

²⁶ Acts 17:30

²⁷ Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 2:1; Galatians 6:1-2

²⁸ Corinthians 7:10

²⁹ Romans 8:1ff.; 1 Peter 2:9-12

circumstances decreed by His providence. Glorifying God in our sexual lives will at times entail suffering or persecution of various sorts, but, by God's empowering grace, we aspire to obey Him with joy.³⁰³¹

The Ministry of the Church

The Church belongs to God.³² He called us out of the dominion of darkness with its sin and degradation into the glorious light of His love.³² He has called us to reflect His glory by displaying His character and proclaiming His Word to ourselves and the world. As repentant and forgiven sinners, we in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church resolve to teach the biblical truths of godly sexuality to our members and to all who will listen, with compassion and with courage, regardless of the cost to ourselves. To do otherwise would be a failure of love. We will strive by God's grace to discipline our personal lives and our local churches in accordance with God's Word. **God helping us, we shall continue, within our churches and in the public arena, to teach against and to refuse to condone or participate in any sinful form of sexual practice³³—including sexual abuse,³⁴ pornography,³⁵³⁶³⁷ sexual lust,³⁷ extra-marital sex,³⁸ adultery,³⁸ polygamy,³⁹ unbiblical divorce and remarriage,⁴⁰ homosexual conduct,⁴¹ same-sex union and marriage,⁴³ and gender reassignment.⁴⁴ At the same time, we resolve to continue to love those who have committed these sins and/or suffered from them. And we shall wait with eager longing for the day of our Savior's return, when all shall be made right with us and the world. In the name of Jesus, our compassionate Savior, we tenderly welcome all—regardless of their beliefs or lifestyles—to attend our churches. Further, we invite into the membership of our churches all those who—bruised and broken by the Fall—seek now, through sincere faith and genuine repentance, to live in obedience to the Scriptures and empowered by the Holy Spirit.**

To God's Name be glory forever.

⁴³ Matthew 5:13-16; Romans 1:32; 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:14

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Galatians 5:19-23; Philippians 4:11-13

³⁰ Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; James 1:2-4

³¹ Peter 1:18-19; Ephesians 5:25; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

³² Colossians 1:13; John 12:46, 1 Peter 2:9-10

³³ Romans 13:13, 14; Ephesians 5:3

³⁴ Deuteronomy 22:25-27; Ephesians 5:28-31

³⁵ Matthew 5:27-30; Romans 8:5-13; Ephesians 2:3

³⁶ Thessalonians 4:4-5; Colossians 3:5

³⁷ Thessalonians 4:6

³⁸ Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:20; Deuteronomy 22:22; Proverbs 6:32; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9

³⁹ Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4, 5; 1 Timothy 3:2

⁴⁰ Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14. For more, see the EPC "Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage."

⁴¹ Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 7

BOOK OF GOVERNMENT (ON ORDINATION) G.9-3

Now descending for $\frac{3}{4}$ Presbytery Approval, to 2027 GA

Previous Language: G. 9-3.A and B

A. According to Scripture, those who bear office in the Church should exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office should exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. A congregation preparing to elect persons to this holy office should carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the Ruling Elder and be very prayerful in selecting persons to this office.

B. As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, Church Officers are especially bound by their calling to fulfill them and to be an example to all.

2026 Approved Language: G. 9-3.A and B

A. According to Scripture, those who bear office in the Church **shall** exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office should **shall** exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. **Whether.single.or.married? officers.must.conform.to.the.biblical.requirement.of.chastity.and.sexual.purity.(see.Westminster.Larger.Catechism.Q^m A.79④79⑥?see.below\).in.their.descriptions.of.themselves?their.convictions?character?and.conduct;** A congregation preparing to elect persons to **these** holy offices **shall** carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to **these.offices** and be very prayerful in selecting persons to **them**.

B. As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, Church Officers are especially bound by their calling to fulfill them and to be an example to all. **Officers.in.the.Evangelical.Presbyterian.Church.must.be.above.reproach.in.their.walk.and.Christlike.in.their.character;While.office.bearers.will.see.spiritual.perfection.only.in.glory?they.will.continue.in.this.life.to.confess.and.to.mortify.remaining.sins.in.light.of.God's.work.of.progressive.sanctification;Therefore?to.be.qualified.for.office?they.must.affirm.the.sinfulness.of.fallen.desires?the.reality.and.hope.of.progressive.sanctification?and.be.committed.to.the.pursuit.of.Spirit.empowered.victory.over.their.sinful.temptations?inclinations?and.actions;**

***Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 138**

What duties does the Seventh Commandment require?

The Seventh Commandment requires us to:

- Be sexually pure in our body, mind, emotions, words, and actions.
- Help preserve sexual purity in both ourselves and others.
- Guard what we look at and what we allow our senses to take in.
- Practice self-control and moderation.
- Choose wholesome friendships and influences.
- Dress modestly.
- Marry if we do not have the gift of remaining single.
- Show faithful love and intimacy within marriage.
- Work diligently in our daily calling.
- Avoid situations that encourage sexual temptation.
- Resist temptations to sexual immorality.

***Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 139**

What sins does the Seventh Commandment forbid?

Besides neglecting the duties required, the Seventh Commandment forbids:

- Adultery
- Sexual relations outside marriage
- Rape
- Incest
- Homosexual acts ("sodomy," in the historical language of the catechism)
- All sexual desires and practices contrary to God's design
- Lustful thoughts, fantasies, intentions, and desires
- Vulgar or sexually immoral speech, or enjoying such speech
- Lustful looks
- Flirtatious or sexually suggestive behavior
- Immodest dress
- Wrongly forbidding marriage or permitting unlawful marriages
- Prostitution and supporting it
- Unbiblical vows requiring perpetual celibacy
- Unnecessarily delaying marriage when self-control is lacking
- Polygamy
- Unjust divorce or abandonment
- Idleness
- Gluttony
- Drunkenness
- Keeping immoral company
- Sexually provocative entertainment, literature, images, music, dancing, or theatrical performances
- Anything else that encourages or leads ourselves or others into sexual impurity.

BOOK OF GOVERNMENT (ON ORDINATION) G.12-2, 3, 6

Now descending for $\frac{3}{4}$ Presbytery Approval, to 2027 GA

Previous Language: G. 12-2, 3, 6

G. 12-2. B The Candidate shall be examined in Christian experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth

G. 12-3.A Examination of an EPC Teaching Elders seeking to transfer into a Presbytery EPC Teaching Elders shall be examined on views of the areas indicated in G.12-2 and they shall relate their experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth.

G. 12-3.B.1 Examination of an ordained Minister from another Reformed denomination: A Minister seeking to become a Teaching Elder in a Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church from another denomination from within the Reformed family shall present credentials of education required by those seeking ordination in the EPC. The Minister shall be examined on views and beliefs and may be examined on knowledge.

G. 12-6 The Session shall confer with each person elected to office in the local church to determine if that person feels called to office and is willing to serve faithfully. The Session shall examine candidates for ordination to the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon on 1) personal experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth, 2) theology and Sacraments of the Church, 3) the government, discipline, worship, and history of the Church, and 4) an understanding of the office to which one is elected.

2026 Approved Language: G. 12-2, 3, 6

G. 12-2.B Candidates shall be examined in Christian experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord, and steady progress in spiritual growth.

G. 12-3.A Examination of an EPC Teaching Elders seeking to transfer into a Presbytery EPC Teaching Elders shall be examined on views of the areas indicated in G.12-2 and they shall relate their experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, **faithful.conformity.to.his.character?obedience.to.him.as.Lord?and.steady.progress.in.spiritual.growth;**

G. 12-3.B.1 Examination of an ordained Minister from another Reformed denomination: A Minister seeking to become a Teaching Elder in a Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church from another denomination from within the Reformed family shall present credentials of education required by those seeking ordination in the EPC. Ministers shall be examined on views and beliefs and may be examined on knowledge **and.shall.relate.experience.of.the.saving.grace.of.God.in.Jesus.Christ?faithful.conformity.to.his.character?obedience.to.him.as.Lord?and.steady.progress.in.spiritual.growth;**

G. 12-6 The Session shall confer with each person nominated to office in the local church to determine if that person feels called to office and is willing to serve faithfully. The Session shall examine candidates for ordination to the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon on 1) personal experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, **their.faithful.conformity.to.his.character?obedience.to.him.as.Lord?and.steady.progress.in.spiritual.growth?**2) theology and Sacraments of the Church, 3) the government, discipline, worship, and history of the Church, and 4) an understanding of the office to which one is elected.