

Report of the Ad-Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction and Ordination Standards

The 44th General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) voted to create a moderator-appointed, Ad-Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction and Ordination Standards and for our committee to make a final report and recommendations to the 46th General Assembly. Our committee was formed to address how the EPC should consider the expectations for penitence and sanctification of someone who experiences ongoing same-sex attraction but remains committed to the historic and orthodox biblical sexual ethic, and then to address in what circumstances such a person would be eligible for consideration for ordained office in the EPC.

Summary of Recommendations

Our recommendations in summary are to amend:

- The EPC's "Position Paper on Human Sexuality" to provide greater clarity on how our doctrine of sin and sanctification shapes our ethics of sexual conduct;
- The section "Same-Sex Attraction" in the EPC's "Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality" to provide greater clarity on how our doctrine of sin and sanctification shapes our ethics of sexual conduct, particularly in regards to same-sex attraction and ordination.
- Two sections of *Book of Government* 9-3 (9-3.A, 9-3.B) to clarify character requirements of EPC officers pertinent to sexual ethics;
- Four sections of *Book of Government* 12 (12-2.B, 12-3.A, 12-3.B.1, 12-6) to add requirements to examine nominees to all EPC offices in the area of Christian character;

Summary of Work

We were tasked to clarify, align, and strengthen the EPC's witness in light of our doctrinal standards. The EPC's doctrine and pastoral wisdom in the Position Paper and Pastoral Letter are commendable, and we continue to affirm with them that

- Marriage is instituted by God as a covenant between one man and one woman and that sexual intimacy is reserved exclusively for that union (e.g. Position Paper, page 1 "The Divine Origin and Purpose of Human Sexuality; page 4, "The Married Life").
- Homoerotic behavior and desires are sinful and must be repented of and mortified. (e.g. Position Paper, page 6, "The Ministry of the Church"; Pastoral Letter, page 2-4, "Contemporary Challenges").

In addition to reviewing the EPC's documents, we were charged to study the Scriptures and the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms to bring clarity to our witness regarding the following areas, which we did in our recommended amendments:

1) Theological anthropology, with respect to human sexuality as it pertains to contemporary usage of the sexual self-conception and how such language comports with Scripture and the Westminster standards:

- We affirm that all people are created in God's image, that his design for marriage and sex is present in creation, that the fall into sin did not terminate God's good design, that marriage and sex have been affirmed as good by Jesus our redeemer, that the single life has also been affirmed by Christ, and that the meaning, purpose, and redemption of marriage and sex finds its consummation in our union and communion with God, of which we have a foretaste now (e.g.

Position Paper page, 1-2, “The Divine Purpose and Origin of Human Sexuality; Pastoral Letter, page 6-7, “Our Counsel to the Body of Christ”).

- We affirm that we are new creations in Christ, and all other identities we have must be understood relative to our union with Christ and subordinated to him on his terms as our Lord. We must understand and think of ourselves first and foremost “as dead to sin, with it having no dominion over us because we are alive in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (e.g. Pastoral Letter, page 5, “Our Counsel to Those who Experience Same-Sex Attraction”)
- We affirm that the language we use to self-describe should reflect our identity as being united to Jesus and should not invite confusion from our own heart, the church, or the world; we affirm for this reason that it is inappropriate to use the term “gay Christian” (e.g. Pastoral Letter, page 6, “Our Counsel to Those who Experience Same-Sex Attraction”)

2) Progressive Sanctification and how it informs the Reformed understanding of the mortification of sin and the doctrine of repentance; 3a) Concupiscence as it relates to a Reformed conception of the Christian’s new nature in Christ:

- We affirm that all of our sinful transgressions emerge from our corrupted sin nature, and this corruption of our hearts, along with all its impulses, is itself sin, and continues in the regenerate all their life long. This is the Reformed doctrine of ‘concupiscence’. (e.g. Position Paper, page 1-2, “The Divine Origin and Purpose of Human Sexuality”; Pastoral Letter, page 4-5, “Our Counsel to Those who Experience Same-Sex Attraction”)
- We affirm that in our union with Christ we have been regenerated, receive a new heart and spirit, and are further sanctified. Original sin and its nature remain in the believer all their life long, yet through the continual supply of Christ’s Spirit, the believer is able to resist, deny, repent of and kill sin, and grow in holiness. These spiritual realities are true of same-sex attraction. (e.g. Position Paper, page 2, “The Divine Origin and Purpose of Human Sexuality”; Pastoral Letter, page 4-5, “Our Counsel to Those who Experience Same-Sex Attraction”)

3b) and when homosexual temptation, like other temptations disqualifies one from ordained office:

- We affirm that “that our Lord Jesus sympathizes with us in our weaknesses because he both suffered when tempted and was tempted in every respect like us, yet without sin” and that “As our king, Jesus corrects us in our sin and supports us in our temptations and sufferings”. Temptations may come upon us, but Jesus always presents a way of escape and we are enabled to not enter into temptation. The experience of temptation, including the temptation to homosexuality, by itself does not disqualify one from ordained office. Entering into temptation with unrepentant behaviors and lusts does disqualify from ordained office. (e.g. Position Paper, page 2, “The Divine Origin and Purpose of Human Sexuality”; page 4-5, “A Call to Holiness”; Pastoral Letter, page 4-5, “Our Counsel to Those who Experience Same-Sex Attraction”; page 7, “Our Counsel to the Body of Christ”; page 11, “Our Counsel to Pastors, Sessions, and Presbyteries”)

4) The Christian hope for those who experience and flee sexual temptation, especially homosexual temptation:

- We affirm that through faith in Jesus we are forgiven all our sexual sins, washed from our impurity, and given the power of the Holy Spirit to live lives worthy of the gospel. This is true for those who continue to experience same-sex attraction as the latent pull and temptation, unindulged, towards homosexuality. (e.g. Position Paper, page 5, “Recovering from Sexual Brokenness”)
- We affirm that even in our experience of same-sex attraction that we must be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Our hope is that if we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus and

suffer with him, we have fellowship with Jesus in his life. (e.g. Pastoral Letter, page 6, “Our Counsel to Those who Experience Same-Sex Attraction”).

- We affirm that God can redeem and heal all corrupted by sin and the Fall, and that may include those who have fled homosexual temptation becoming open to a biblical marriage and developing opposite-sex sexual desires. Whether married or single, God’s promise and our expectation is that ultimate and true healing is found in the return of Jesus. As we repent and are sanctified in this life, God promises to grow us in righteousness and holiness by his Spirit. God promises to enable us to flee every temptation and that Christ will carry us in our weakness (e.g. Pastoral Letter, page 7, “Our Counsel to the Body of Christ”).

5) How the answers to these questions might inform standards for officers who have struggled in these areas but have mortified such temptation and desire:

- We affirm that unrepentant sinful behavior and unrepentant lusts disqualify candidates for office, and that officers of the EPC are to believe, practice, and teach the moral standards contained in the Scriptures and the EPC’s Constitution (e.g. Position Paper, page 4-5, “A Call to Holiness”; page 6, “The Ministry of the Church”; Pastoral Letter, page 8-9, “Our Counsel to Pastors, Sessions, and Presbyteries”).
- We affirm that people who struggle with temptation and who may at times sin sexually, yet are grieving those failures and are striving for repentance and growth in sanctification, may be welcomed as members of the church (e.g. Pastoral Letter, page 9, “Our Counsel to Pastors, Sessions, and Presbyteries”); but
- We affirm that only those “who conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity in their descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character, and conduct should be considered for leadership.” Additionally, we affirm that “Courts may consider for ordination candidates whose ongoing experience of SSA is a corrupted sin nature unindulged, repented of, and mortified; a temptation not entered into, but rather fled; a weakness not embraced, but rather mourned as they rest upon the grace and strength of the Lord.” (e.g. Pastoral Letter, page 9-10, “Our Counsel to Pastors, Sessions, and Presbyteries”; *Book of Government* recommendations).