

Board of Trustees Statement on Sexual Ethics

Covenant Love, Sexuality, and Community: Sexual Ethics in Biblical and Theological Perspective

A note from the Board Chairman: “This statement, which places sexual ethics in a biblical and theological perspective and is grounded in our evangelical identity, is simply intended as a fuller statement that expands on the basis for principles found in the College’s Life and Conduct Statement.”

Introduction

Gordon College seeks to ground our understanding of human sexuality firmly in the Scriptures. We share a common commitment to the authority and truth of God’s Word as it unites us in the Body of Christ.

Creation in the Image of God

God’s nature is uniquely transcendent as well as personal and relational. When God chose to create adam male and female, God designed sexual human beings who would be capable of procreation (Gen 1:26–28). Nevertheless, these distinct gender qualities point well beyond biological and psychological maleness and femaleness. There is a profound spiritual dimension, imaging the intimate relational and loving nature within the Godhead, and a metaphysical goodness to the body, an affirmation that is confirmed by the incarnation and resurrection.

The Marriage Paradigm: Union of Adam and Eve

In Genesis 2:18, Adam declared Eve to be “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23), establishing their deep intimate relationship in God’s presence. The superlative “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” is unique to this passage. The gender, intimacy, and union of Adam and Eve were the reference points for Jesus as he affirmed marriage in the context of responding to a question about divorce (Matt 19:1–12). All of the evidence regarding marriage in Scripture is in the context of male and female as they fulfill God’s good purposes and design for covenant union, pleasure, and procreation with children being an embodiment of their parents’ joyful covenant. The permanence and appropriate exclusivity of marriage are symbolic of God’s covenant with his people. The prophets drew on this marriage imagery repeatedly (all of Hosea; Isa 54:5–6; 62:5b; Jer 2:2; Eze 16:8).

Identity in Christ and the Hope of Glory

Mirroring God’s relationship with Israel, Jesus is the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride in union with Christ. Among the profound implications associated with this union is our new identity. We are in Christ. Jesus came to us in our sin and brokenness. He gave us life when we were dead. He gave us friendship when we were alone. He gave us love when we were unloved. He left these parting words: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). Throughout Ephesians, Paul drives home the theme of our union with Christ

and with each other in Christ. The Church is Christ's Bride waiting for the eschatological consummation. The meta-narrative culminates in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6–9; 21:1–2,9).

This transcendent union with Christ requires radical transformation in how we think, speak, and act (Col 3:1–10). We have died with Christ and our life is hidden with Christ in God; we are to put to death “sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5). The direct and explicit list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:7–9 does not stop, however, with the consequences of moral degradation. Instead, it forges ahead to hope: “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Our human sexuality, no matter how it is individually manifested, must be submitted to the Lordship of Christ.

Sin: Implications for Human Sexuality

The choice to disobey the command of God shattered the intimate relationships in the Garden of Eden. God's image in Adam and Eve was left with tragic scars in every aspect. Broken sexuality tears apart the fabric of individual lives, families, and larger social structures. It represents a fundamental lapse in regard to the two greatest commandments: loving God, and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Sexual practices that are affronts to God's holiness are always addressed in unequivocally strong terms in the biblical text. They are uniformly called sin, and this uniformity crosses the cultural and genre boundaries evident in the biblical text. Thus, the following practices are displeasing to God: lust, immorality, sexual abuse, divorce (Matt 19:1–9 and parallels), and same-sex sex (Lev 18:22 and 20:13 echoed by Paul in 1 Cor 6:9–11; Ro 1:24–32).

The Call to Faithfulness: Sexual Self-Discipline and Faithful Singleness

Sexual self-discipline means making choices that establish healthy patterns of thought. Paul admonished us to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Whole patterns of thinking about our identity need to be reoriented with Christ at the center. We remember the sanctity of marriage and strive to protect it (Heb 13:4) from the temptations of immorality and adultery.

In his own life, Jesus powerfully affirmed singleness. The author of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are but was without sin (Heb 2:14–18). Jesus is also the model for intimate companionship as he loved his disciples. For as long as we are called to be single, we are in God's perfect purposes and that singleness is blessed. Faithful singleness offers to each one of us a reminder of our eternal state.

We are called to a new perspective on love. There are profound depths and heights of righteous, holy, pure, and tender love that transcend the fieriest sexual passion. It is not a matter of repressing desire but of persevering through that desire to reach the

extraordinary love beyond. This is the love that is utterly self-sacrificial as we serve God's Kingdom; loving in this manner is a sacred task.

Implications for Life Together

We are fellow pilgrims, lovingly bearing one another's burdens (Gal 6:2). The end goal is transformed thinking, through which we practice discernment, grace, and unconditional love for one another rather than judgment. We are to be known by the kind of forgiveness that God has abundantly poured out in endless proportions to us. We are called to be faithful to the whole of Scripture, articulating both the seriousness of all sins, and the mighty transforming power of God's grace and indwelling Spirit. God's people are a body in transition, in preparation for life in the presence of God. That entails processes of refining, purifying, self-examination, self-control, self-sacrifice, confession, repentance, and renewal so that when we come into the radiance of his holiness and perfection, we are dressed in the righteousness of Christ alone and the Spirit has done the necessary work of preparation.