

The Presbyterian Church of Australia

STATEMENT ON
SEX, GENDER & MARRIAGE



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Statement on Sex, Gender and Marriage

In the last few decades there have been radical shifts in the way many people in Western culture look at sex, gender and marriage. The twenty-first century has seen discussion and debate about gender identity, sexual orientation and the nature of marriage which would have been unthinkable fifty years before. Amid these debates and in the context of significant cultural change, it is important that churches make clear how the Bible addresses sex, gender and marriage.

In the Presbyterian Church of Australia the General Assembly of Australia and State Assemblies have issued statements dealing with aspects of these discussions. The 2019 General Assembly of Australia adopted a Statement summarising these and including other material to give a concise and comprehensive summary statement of the position of the Church, in the light of the teaching of the Bible. The 2023 General Assembly added some further elements to the statement.

This statement is intended as a guide for Ministers, Sessions and Church institutions both in teaching and pastoral care and to provide information and encouragement for church members. It also serves as a reference for enquiries about the position of the Church on issues of sex, gender and marriage.

The Statement outlines how the Bible addresses such issues in terms of God's created order, the impact of sin, the redeeming work of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit and the hope of a new creation. It then sets out some principles of teaching and pastoral care. Issues related to sex, gender and marriage are deeply personal and often very complex. The principles offered here are not intended to be a full guide in such situations, but to provide a framework in which they can be considered.

The Statement includes biblical references, and references to the doctrinal basis of the Presbyterian Church of Australia – the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) read in the light of the Declaratory Statement of 1901.

Church and Nation Committee
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1 SEX, GENDER AND MARRIAGE STATEMENT

Preamble

The Presbyterian Church of Australia seeks to be faithful to God by holding to the teaching of Scripture in faith and life. Our Subordinate Standard affirms the biblical teaching that God created us male and female (WCF 4.2) and that marriage is to be between one man and one woman (WCF 24.1). This statement presents the Church's understanding of humanity in relation to sex, marriage and gender, based on the teaching of Scripture.

This statement uses the terms 'sex' and 'gender' as is common in contemporary discussion. Sex is the binary differentiation of humans as male or female by chromosomes, hormones and the reproductive organs which makes possible reproduction. Gender refers to a person's self-understanding, social identity and social presentation. The position of this statement is that a person's gender should be determined by their sex.

In this statement the Church:

- expresses its joy in God our Creator and his good order of creation;
 - expresses its grief over the effects of our Fall into sin in distorting God's good order;
 - expresses its faith in the Lord Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Saviour;
 - expresses its hope in God's promise of a new creation in which righteousness dwells; and
 - reaffirms its commitment to serving Christ, his church and his world in the area of sex, gender and marriage.
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2 We rejoice in God our Creator and his good order of creation

- 2.1 All people are made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27; Declaratory Statement §4) and have a common dignity and worth. No one should be mocked, hated, or bullied.
- 2.2 God established a good order in his creation (WCF 5.1) in which humans were either male or female (Gen 1:27; 5:2; WCF 5.2), sharing a common humanity (Gen 2:23), but distinguished biologically through their capacity to conceive children together through sexual intercourse (Gen 2:24; 4:1). These differences should be recognised and celebrated. Men and women are equally created in God's image and are to express their gender in complementary relationships, especially in a loving marriage (Gen 2:18; Deut 22:5; 1Co 11:14-15; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-21; 1 Tim 2:12-14) and also within leadership in the household of God (1 Cor 14:29-35; 1 Tim 2:11-3:7; Titus 1:6-9).
- 2.3 In God's good order, human beings have been created with a biological sex (male or female) with different genetic, chromosomal and anatomical characteristics (Gen 1:27; 2:24; 4:1; WCF 5.2) which determines gender identity (self-recognition of being either a man or a woman) and gendered roles in relationships (for example being either a husband or a wife, Gen 2:24-25). While the Bible does not closely prescribe expression of gender (for example tastes, clothing, personality traits etc), Christians should express themselves in godly ways which do not mislead others in their culture as to their sex and gender (Deut 22:5; 1 Cor 11: 2-16).
- 2.4 Marriage is a union of a husband and a wife, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life (WCF 24.1), which for the good order of society is established by a public commitment. It is a sign of the love that exists between Christ and his

church (Eph. 5:24–33). The purpose of marriage is lifelong love, intimacy and companionship, to provide the most favourable and stable environment to reproduce and nurture children, and to promote the health and stability of society (Gen 2:18; Ecc 4:9–11; Deut 6:1–7; Eph 6:1–4; Prov14:1; Pss 127 & 128; WCF 24.2). In the unity and partnership of marriage the husband is the head of the wife. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, and a wife is to submit to her husband (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21–30). Marriage is the only proper setting for sexual activity. It is the divinely ordained environment for the raising and nurturing of children.

- 2.5 Married couples are commanded by God to be faithful. All sexual activity outside of marriage is prohibited (Ex 20:14; 22:19; Lev 19:29; Deut 5:18; 22:13–21; 1Co 6:9–10; Heb 13:4; Rev 21:8; 22:15), as is abuse and violence within marriage (1 Pet 3:7). Divorce is prohibited, except on proper grounds (Mal 2:15; Mt 19:4–8; Mk 10:6–9; 1Co 7:10–14; WCF 24.5–6).

3 We mourn the effects of the Fall and our own sin as they distort God's good order

- 3.1 The fall of Adam rendered all humanity guilty and subject to God's eternal punishment (Rom 5:12-19). It corrupted us and the created order. 'Our first parents ... fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body', and 'the same death in sin and corrupted nature' was 'conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation' (WCF 6.1-3). As a consequence, all humans turn away from God, refuse to obey him, and worship created things instead (Rom 1:25) — including marriage and sexual experiences — and seek to establish sexual and gender identities apart from God and his order (Rom 1:26-27). All humans face struggle, distress and distortion in our experiences of gender and sexuality and marriage.
- 3.2 From the Fall, human sin and God's curse have disordered and frustrated God's good creation pattern (Gen 3:14-19; Rom 8:19-21). Humans have sought to make sense of their world and establish their identities apart from God (Prov 1:7; 12:23; Rom 1:21-29; 7:5,14-18; Eph 4:22). Relationships between husband and wife are spoiled (Gen 3:7,12,16; 4:19,23), spouses are abusive and unfaithful in marriage and marriages end in divorce (Dt 21:13-14; Mal 2:10-16; Mt 19:4-8; 1Co 7:10-14). Women are oppressed (Ge 34:7-31; Deut 22:28-29; Jdg 19:22-20:7; 2Sa 13:1-32; Zec 14:2; 1 Pet 3:7). Polygamy and polyandry are both corruptions of God's good pattern of marriage (Gen 4:19; 29:30; 30:1; Dt 21:15-17; 17:17; 1 Ki 16:31; 1Co 7:2; 1Ti 3:2). Men and women are tempted to, and participate in, sexual immorality (Ge 39:6-12; 2Sa 11:2-5; Mt 5:27-28; 1 Pe 4:3; 2 Pe 2:14-18) including, adultery (Ex 20:14; Lev 18:20; Dt 5:18; Pr 22:14; 30:20;

Mt 19:18; Jas 2:11), pre-marital sex (Dt 22:13-21, 23; Matt 1:19;), polyamory, homosexual sex (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10), incest (Lev 18:6-18; 20:17,19; Dt 22:30; 27:20,22-23; Eze 22:11), and rape (Ge 19:4-9; Dt 22:25-29; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Jdg 19:22-28; 20:4-5; 2 Sa 13:14-20). A further effect of sin is that men and women transgress the boundaries of their sex (Deut 22:5; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Cor 11:4-5, 13-15).

- 3.3 One consequence of the Fall is that some people are born with conditions in which their sex organs are not easily characterised as either male or female, or their sex organs are not consistent with their sex chromosomes (sometimes called intersex conditions or disorders of sex development). These are often physically uncomfortable and emotionally distressing conditions.
- 3.4 A further consequence of the Fall is that some people experience their gender to be different to their sex (sometimes called gender incongruence, gender identity disorder or gender dysphoria). This is often a very distressing and confusing experience.
- 3.5 People who suffer from these conditions and experiences are equally made in God's image and share in the common dignity and worth of all human beings. However, these conditions do not constitute a third sex or gender, nor do they contradict the truth that in his originally good creation, God has established a binary sexual order for human beings. Binary biological sex remains the basis on which we understand these experiences.
- 3.6 All forms of sexual immorality are sin, as is marital unfaithfulness through violence, or desertion. Jesus condemns all sexual immorality, teaching that sin begins prior to any such act, in the corruption of heart and eye (2 Sam 11) with a lustful, covetous look, a redirecting of desires, emotions and fantasies (Matt 5:27-28; Prov 6:23-29; Jer 5:8).

- 3.7 People are tempted to turn from God's good order and break his commands in all aspects of sexual life and gender, as is the case in all other areas of human life after the Fall. Temptations to sin can arise externally to ourselves, as Jesus experienced (Matt 4:1-11). For all fallen human beings, temptations also arise from their sinful nature and external temptations appeal to their corrupted desires. The corrupted nature and all the covetous desires that proceed from it, including involuntary or pre-conscious attractions towards ends contrary to God's law, are truly and properly sin and we are culpable for them (2 Peter 3:3; 1 Jn 2:16-17; WCF 6:4-6). We are all prone to living out these sinful desires in thought, word and deed (Jam 1:13-15). All sexual temptations are to be resisted and are desires which should be mortified (Gal 5:24). There is a pastorally significant moral difference between experiencing sinful desires and seeking to mortify them, as opposed to cultivating desires into actions (James 1:14-15).
- 3.8 Christians who do not struggle with gender incongruence or same-sex attraction can possess unwarranted self-righteousness ignoring their own sinful desires, their need to repent and their need for mercy in Christ. Everyone's expression of sexuality and gender has sinful aspects, and all desire for sexual activity outside the boundaries of marriage is illicit.
- 3.9 Modern Western culture has developed in a framework in which God is not relevant to understanding the world or shaping ethics. This has promoted a culture which views each person as free to determine their own identity and moral framework; and assumes that diversity, including gender and sexual diversity, is a good in itself; and that pleasure and comfort are primary. This culture does not acknowledge the existence of God's good creational order and often celebrates changes which transgress that order. It also presents temptations through sexualised advertising, pornography and social pressures in friendships and in employment and educational contexts.

3.10 The church, in seeking to teach and apply the biblical view of sex, gender and marriage has often failed to acknowledge our own sin and has caused undue hurt. We have failed to adequately understand the struggles of others; and, in doing so, have prevented the gospel being heard by those who, like us, are in desperate need of salvation and secure identity in Christ. As a church we are accountable to the Lord Jesus for our treatment of others, especially those who are young in the faith (Matt 18:6; 1 Pet 4:17).

4 We look to Christ for redemption, proclaim him as Lord and Saviour and seek to live for him in ways consistent with God's good order

- 4.1 In his incarnation, God the Son took on human nature to redeem people from sin, to heal them from corruption and reconcile them to God, and to restore God's good order to creation. He achieved this by his life, death, resurrection and ascension (Jn 3:16-21; Eph 1:3-10; 1 Pet 1:1-9; WCF 8).
- 4.2 The gospel, which proclaims Christ as the Saviour for all who trust him, is offered to all people (Isa 57:19; Acts 2:39; Rom 1:5; 3:24; 1 Tim 2:4). Everyone who comes to Christ is welcomed by him and included in his salvation (John 6:37). In Christ, his people find their true humanity and a new identity, irrespective of their gender, sexuality, marital status, family background, social status or ethnicity. They are restored to the image of God in Christ and united with each other in him (Rom 10:12; 1Co 12:13; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:10, 15; 4:22-24; Col 3:10-11). Christ is the answer to the underlying problems for all people – including those facing sexual temptation, the consequences of sexual sin, broken and difficult marriages, loneliness, shame, and gender confusion.
- 4.3 Christ calls all people, though lost in sin, to come to him to be reconciled to God and discover their true humanity in his service. By his Spirit working through his Word and prayer, God draws sinners to him, transforming our rebellion into love and reordering our desires and deeds to conform to Christ. By his Spirit, he enables us to grieve and hate our sinful nature and to recognise and repent of particular sins, particularly (Lk 3:10-14; Rom 8:3-9; WCF 10.1, 13.1, 15.5). Truthfully and humbly naming sin and calling people to repentance are not harmful because of God's gracious mercy and the sanctifying power and promised

fullness of life in Christ (John 10:10; Acts 2:38, 2 Cor 7:10).

- 4.4 By his Spirit, all believers must struggle against sin and constantly turn to Christ, putting to death the sinful nature with its particular sins (Rom 6:11-14; WCF 13, 15:5). The Spirit helps us to humbly speak the truth in love and encourage one another to grow in Christ (Eph 4:15-16). We should exercise wisdom in choosing language that articulates the truth about ourselves, naming our sins but not being named by them (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Christians should flee sin (Gen 39:6b-12; Matt 5:27-30; 1 Cor 6:18; Rom 6:11-12; 1 Pet 1:14; 2:11), and hence be careful to avoid legitimising sin by using descriptions that either down-play or even celebrate temptation.
- 4.5 God does not promise to heal all broken bodies or human relationships, nor to end temptation, nor remove homosexual attraction, gender confusion or other burdens in this life. Neither does he say that sinful desires are fixed and can never be changed. He promises that, because we are his chosen, redeemed and sanctified children, his grace will be sufficient in all our trials (2 Cor. 12:9) and his Spirit will bear rich fruit in every aspect of our lives (Gal 5:13-25). He also promises that on the return of Christ all his people will receive resurrected and restored bodies and enjoy full communion with him in a world of righteousness freed from curse and frustration (Rom 8:20-24; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-5).
- 4.6 An unmarried person who is a follower of Jesus Christ is called to live faithfully for him in chastity. Singleness is a proper and honourable Christian calling, since it was the calling of the Lord Jesus himself (Matt 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:32-35; 1 Tim 5:5).
- 4.7 Married couples who follow Jesus Christ are called to live together faithfully as husband and wife, loving and serving one another. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the

church, and wives are to submit to their husbands (Col. 3:18–19; Eph. 5:22–33; Tit 2:4-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7). Parents are to love their children and raise them in the training and instruction of the Lord (Gen 18:19; Deut 6:7; Col 3:21; Eph 6:4). Children are to honour and obey their parents (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16; Pr 6:20; Col 3:20; Eph 6:1-2).

- 4.8 An intersex person who is a follower of Jesus Christ should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known. Surgical treatment to enable this may be appropriate, though it is not morally necessary.
- 4.9 A person who experiences gender incongruence and who is a follower of Jesus Christ should accept their body as inherent to their personhood, given to them by God, and seek to reconcile their understanding and presentation of their gender according to this fundamental truth. Learning to live consistently with this may be an on-going and difficult process, yet, as with all Christians, their union with Christ through his Spirit will lead them to grow in grace.
- 4.10 Both the desire for, and the act of, sexual relations with a person of the same sex are sinful (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11). Such desires should be rejected and mortified, as a Christian seeks “to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24). The good news for those who experience same-sex attraction (as indeed for all sexual sinners) is that in Christ they can be known and identified not according to their sexual impulses but as beloved children of God, forgiven and justified, freed from guilt and shame, set apart for growth in Christlikeness and good works, secure in resurrection life, and precious brothers and sisters in Christ.
- 4.11 Faithful proclamation of the gospel requires the church to give a clear public witness in word and action to the righteousness of

God, the nature and consequences of human sin, including its impact on the curse and frustration of the fallen creation, and God's free offer of grace in the Lord Jesus (Jn 16:8; Acts 2:23, 17:16-17, 30-31; Rom 1:18-3:20). The church presents God's good order and his moral law to the wider society, in part for the sake of the common good which is promoted by a recognition of the moral law. The church is not called to provide moral discipline for society (1 Cor 5:9-10), nor to seek moral reformation of society apart from gospel ministry. The priority of its mission is to proclaim Christ and to call people to salvation in him.

5 We live in eager expectation of God's new creation

- 5.1 The Lord has promised at his return a new creation where righteousness will dwell, and his people will enjoy glorious freedom in his presence, and he will wipe away all their tears (Rom 8:21; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-5; WCF 33.2). So, we live in hope, longing for and praying for the day when we shall be fully conformed to Christ and the created order will be gloriously transformed, healed of all disorder and corruption. In the presence of the Triune God, God's people will be given the fullness of their new identity in Christ (1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Rev 22:4-5).
- 5.2 In the new creation, marriage and sexuality will reach their fulfillment in the marriage of Christ the lamb to his people (Rev 19:7; 21:2). Jesus declares there will be no marriage at the resurrection, which means that marriage is temporal, and not an 'ultimate' relationship for humanity, but one that points to this ultimate fulfillment (Matt 22:30). We do not know the details of how bodies will be transformed and how that will reflect sex or intersex conditions. The bodies of God's people will be glorified and made to be like Christ (1 Cor. 15:35-53; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Jn 3:2).
- 5.3 Only then will God's people be freed from temptation and able to love him perfectly and freely (WCF 9.5).

6 We commit ourselves to serving Christ, his church and his world in the area of sex, marriage and gender

- 6.1 As the Church addresses issues of sex, gender and marriage in its teaching and pastoral ministry it should teach and act in consistency with the understanding set out in this statement in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit.
 - 6.2 It is important to differentiate between cultural trends and movements, and the situation of individuals. The Church should identify for its members, and for the society, false views about marriage, sex and gender. It should do so in a way that is gracious, compassionate and engaging, and which offers life lived for Christ as a genuine alternative. It should treat those who are influenced by these movements as victims in need of compassion and, like all people, sinners in need of repentance. The Church should remain sensitive to congregation members who may struggle with gender or sexuality issues.
 - 6.3 The deeply personal nature of sex, gender and marriage makes teaching about these areas, and the provision of pastoral care, particularly complex. We should seek to be informed as well as possible, to welcome advice from those with relevant personal and professional experience and constantly to seek wisdom from the Lord.
 - 6.4 Good pastoral care will involve determining with those concerned, in light of the teaching of Scripture, how they can live faithfully in Christ. It will involve supporting them in this and, in love, holding them accountable for their actions. It may involve helping them access the services of appropriate professionals who should share a view of sex, gender and marriage consistent with this statement.
 - 6.5 We should seek to build churches in which people of all ages
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grow together in the gospel, and which share the gospel of God's love in Christ. Our churches should aim to reinforce, enrich and model identity in Christ in contrast to the idolatrous identities of the world. Churches should seek to model faithfulness in marriage and singleness, and to support single people, couples moving toward marriage and married couples to live godly lives and to serve Christ together. The Church should be a community in which people can be honest about their temptations and pain and receive compassionate support from fellow believers as they seek to live faithfully.

- 6.6 The Church teaches that a marriage can only end in divorce when the marriage covenant is broken (Matt. 19:3–9, WCF 14.4-5). It should seek to support marriages and encourage reconciliation where possible (1 Cor 7:10-11).
 - 6.7 The Church teaches that God opposes abuse and violence in marriage and in the family. He particularly warns husbands to be considerate to their wives and treat them with respect (Eph 5:28–30; 1 Pet 3:7). Acts of domestic violence and abuse are heinous sins. In providing pastoral care, church leaders should be alert for signs of domestic and family violence, and teaching in churches should address these issues. Domestic violence may be a valid ground for divorce, along with adultery and desertion (WCF 24:6).
 - 6.8 No office bearer of the Church shall solemnise or bless a union between two people other than that between a man and a woman who have no legal impediment to marriage.
 - 6.9 Biological or natal sex is the relevant basis on which the church makes decisions about qualifications for marriage, church membership and church office.
 - 6.10 The Church will not ordain any person who is involved in a sexual relationship outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. No church officer nor anyone in a position of leadership or responsibility within the Church should be involved in such a relationship.
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6.11 All schools, training colleges, aged care facilities, charitable organisations, and other ministries and institutions operated by, in connection with, or under the authority or control of the Church are to operate in a manner, and for purposes, consistent with the understanding of sex, gender and marriage set out in this statement. Church property is only to be used in a manner and for purposes consistent with that understanding.

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