

A BODY FOR
THE *Lord*

*The PCA Papers
on Human Sexuality*





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THE BODY IS NOT MEANT FOR
SEXUAL IMMORALITY,
BUT FOR THE LORD, AND
THE LORD FOR THE BODY.

– *1 Corinthians 6:13b* –

Foreword

“It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

GENESIS 2:18

So, God created woman and brought her to the man.

God declares His creation “very good.” Yet, man rebelled against God’s order. That rebellion brought shame and relational strife. The Bible’s story continues with many tragic accounts of mankind’s pursuit of sexual relationships contrary to God’s design. Paul reminds the Corinthians how the gospel has freed them from the chains of sexual immorality and declares, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor. 6:13).

From its earliest years, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has declared itself to be “Committed to Scripture, true to the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.” This three-part commitment has been frequently challenged by the shifting sands of a secular culture. There is constant pressure to conform or withdraw from the world. At times, that pressure has led to sharp disagreements among members and officers who long to remain committed to Scripture as they speak to a world so desperately in need of the gospel. Over the last decade, this pressure and these disagreements have intensified as the sexual standards in western culture continue to move farther from God’s design.

In order to maintain the purity and peace of the PCA, the General Assembly has acted to provide guidance to members who struggle with sexual sin yet yearn to live in the blessing and freedom of God’s design for our bodies. The Assembly received

reports and approved Presbytery Overtures in an attempt to help members better understand how to think and live according to God's Word. This joint publication of the Administrative Committee (AC) and the Committee on Discipleship Ministries (CDM) brings together a number of those reports and actions. Although none of these actions have binding constitutional authority, they provide biblical reflection and godly advice for those who desire to renew their mind in order to avoid conforming to the world (Rom. 12:2).

The material is organized from most recent to past actions/declarations. The 48th General Assembly, meeting in St. Louis, Missouri in June 2021, received the oral and written report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality. That Committee, chaired by Teaching Elder Bryan Chapell, was formed by the 47th General Assembly, meeting in Dallas, Texas in June 2019. (Note: there was no meeting of the General Assembly in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.) Included with the oral report in June 2021, was a videotaped presentation by two members of the Committee, TE Kevin DeYoung and TE Tim Keller. In that video TE DeYoung and TE Keller provided helpful explanations of how Committee members debated and resolved particular issues.

In addition to appointing the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality, the 47th General Assembly affirmed an Overture from Calvary Presbytery (803 yes, 541 no) declaring the "Nashville Statement" to be a biblically faithful declaration and referred the statement to CDM for inclusion in denominational teaching materials. This action was intended to speak into the confusion surrounding gender and sexuality within the evangelical church and the broader culture.

In 2015, the Moderator of the 43rd General Assembly commended the report of a subcommittee of the Cooperative Ministries Committee (CMC) on the topic of homosexuality. The leaders of the ten PCA Committees and Agencies appointed this subcommittee to study and report on this topic as one of the key issues facing the PCA in the 21st century. The subcommittee later presented a helpful bibliography to the 44th General Assembly.

The issues facing the Church may look different, but they are not new. In the late 1970s the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) appointed a committee to study and report on ways to address sexual brokenness in the culture. Of particular concern were ways to address pastorally the needs of those who turn from sexual sin in order to live in the freedom of the gospel. When the RPCES joined the PCA in 1982, the report of that committee became part of the history of theological reflection in the PCA.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul warns readers to flee sexual immorality because the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Whether that sin is heterosexual or homosexual, the only cure for shame, relational strife, and the overwhelming pull of temptation is the new life found in the gospel. United to Christ, we are new creations; moreover, we are provided the empowering grace of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. As we pursue lives of sexual wholeness in a wayward culture, we keep Paul's words before us:

*“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.
So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).*

*TE Stephen T. Estock
Coordinator, PCA Discipleship Ministries (CDM)
October 2021*

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Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality

*Presented to the 48th General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in America (2021)*

In June 2019, the 47th PCA General Assembly in Dallas adopted a recommendation from its Overtures Committee answering Chicago Metro Presbytery’s Overture 42 in the affirmative, as amended by the OC.¹ The GA directed Moderator Donahoe to “*appoint the seven voting members who shall be either PCA teaching or ruling elders, and the Committee shall include at least three teaching and three ruling elders.*” The GA’s assignment to the Committee is shown in Attachment A. Below is a list of members, with brief biographies in Attachment B.

TE Dr. Bryan Chapell	<i>Northern Illinois (Chair)</i>
TE Dr. Kevin DeYoung	<i>Central Carolina</i>
TE Dr. Tim Keller	<i>Metropolitan New York</i>
TE Dr. Jim Weidenaar	<i>Pittsburgh</i>
RE Dr. Derek Halvorson	<i>Tennessee Valley</i>
RE Mr. Kyle Keating	<i>Missouri</i>
RE Mr. Jim Pocta	<i>North Texas</i>

The Committee had eight meetings: Aug. 30, Sept. 9, Oct. 10, Nov. 15, Dec. 13, Feb. 10, Mar. 4, and Apr. 3. Below is a summary of the matters the GA assigned to the Committee, according to the subdivisions of the overture (see Attachment A).

¹ M47GA, 701 (original version of Overture 42); 104 (Overture 42 as amended by GA Overtures Committee).

- 1.a.2 annotated bibliography;
- 1.b.1 nature of temptation, sin, repentance, and the difference between Roman Catholic and Reformed views of concupiscence as regards same-sex attraction;
- 1.b.2 propriety of using terms like “gay Christian” when referring to a believer struggling with same-sex attraction;
- 1.b.3 status of “orientation” as a valid anthropological category;
- 1.b.4 practice of “spiritual friendship” among same-sex attracted Christians;
- 1.c analysis of *WLC* 138 & 139 regarding same-sex attraction, with careful attention given to the compatibility of the 7th commandment and same-sex attraction and the pursuit of celibacy by those attracted to the same sex;
- 1.d exegesis of the terms “*malakoi*” and “*arsenokoitai*” (1 Cor. 6:9);
- 1.e suggested ways to articulate and defend a biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding.

The Report is arranged in six sections (with pertinent overture subdivisions shown in parentheses).

- Preamble
- Twelve Statements (1.b, 1.c, 1.d)
- Confessional Foundations Regarding the Nature of Temptation, Sin, & Repentance (1.b.1)
- Biblical Perspectives for Pastoral Care – Discipleship, Identity, & Terminology (1.b.2-4, 1.c)
- Apologetic Approaches for Speaking to the World (1.e)
- Select Annotated Bibliography (1.a and 2)
- Conclusion
- Attachment A – Assignment from the 47th GA
- Attachment B – AIC Member Bios

Herein the Committee has sought to address the issues and questions assigned to it for study by the 47th General Assembly. Although we are not making any formal recommendations, we hope and pray that this Report will be unifying, edifying, and biblically useful for our denomination.

Preamble

This Committee has been tasked by the 2019 General Assembly to “*study the topic of human sexuality with particular attention to the issues of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism and prepare a report*” (Overture 42 from Chicago Metro Presbytery, as amended [M47GA, 104]). Our task was not to address the whole of human sexuality but limited to specific concerns raised in our denomination.

The Assembly’s adopted overture lists a number of issues that it wants the Report to address, including: (1) the nature of sexual

sin, temptation, and mortification, (2) the propriety (or not) of a Christian referring to himself or herself as a “gay Christian,” (3) the propriety (or not) of speaking of a homosexual “orientation,” and (4) recent practices of incorporating Christians into Christian community who have been attracted to the same sex—all while giving special attention to parts of the Scripture (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6) and the Standards (e.g., *WLC* 138 & 139) that are relevant to these topics.

Our list of assigned topics is long, and we have sought to address them most directly in this Preamble and the immediately following Twelve Statements that we pray are of a length to be most helpful for ease of distribution and common use in the church. This Preamble and Twelve Statements are a summary of our discussions and convictions and provide a theological and pastoral framework for all the other parts of this Report. Our Committee engaged in its most lengthy and precise discussions on these two documents, as we carefully weighed the most critical issues to provide biblical and confessional arguments that we hope will bring clarity and unity on these sensitive subjects for our churches, families, and friends.

Our Committee also gathered explanatory essays from our members that discuss issues assigned to us by the Assembly. We have included these essays in subsequent sections of this Report because, without endorsing how every thought is expressed, we all believe they will be helpful in explaining key understandings behind our Twelve Statements. Finally, we compiled a Select Annotated Bibliography that lists materials we believe will be helpful to the various constituencies of our church who wish to become more informed about these issues. In this bibliography we have provided materials for a variety of audiences (pastors, scholars, parents, children, etc.). Our goal is *not* to present an exhaustive list of all available materials (that would unbalance the elements and efficacy of this Report), but to aid the Church by presenting some of the most useful materials for different constituencies and different purposes. We cannot affirm our agreement with every word or thought in such a wide variety of materials (indeed, sometimes we must make informed readers aware of resources they should be prepared to counter or receive with caution). Our goal is for our

annotations to guide our readers with the biblical discernment needed to hold to what is good and rightly sift what is unbiblical or less certain.

Amidst all these statements and essays we discern two overarching concerns—concerns which may be expressed as two important tasks for the Church in our time and two competing sets of fears.

The two tasks could be called the “pastoral task” and the “apologetic task.” On the one hand, Overture 42 asks that the Report “*help pastors and sessions shepherd congregants who are dealing with same-sex attraction*” (M47GA, 104). On the other hand, it asks for “*suggested ways to articulate and defend a biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding*” (M47GA, 105).

There is no reason why these two tasks need to be pitted against each other, although they often seem to be. One reason they seem at loggerheads is that attached to each undertaking is a set of fears.

One set of fears is that we will be harsh and unfeeling toward people who have been wounded and deeply hurt—and often by the Church. A hard-sounding stance toward them at this moment may only make it easier to discredit the Church in people’s minds. As a consequence, many are afraid the Church will speak in ways which only support the powerful cultural narrative that orthodox Christian belief is toxic for hurting and struggling people.

Another set of fears, however, is that we will compromise at the very place where the world is attacking the Church in our culture. We see many professing Christians and whole denominations surrendering to the sexual revolution. We do not want to be one of them, nor even now in subtle ways to sow the seeds for some future capitulation. As the natural family is a fundamental unit of human society and is the normal means of care and nurture, all sins which threaten, undermine, or marginalize it are both spiritually dangerous and detrimental to human flourishing.

Part of the problem with regard to addressing these issues is that many of us are far more gripped with one set of fears than

the other. But because both of these tasks—the pastoral and the apologetic—are required, we should give each of them strong attention.

Sinclair Ferguson, in his book *The Whole Christ*, reminds us that the two main ways that the gospel is compromised are through legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other. He then says that it is common to fall into “the mistake of prescribing a dose of antinomianism to heal legalism, and vice-versa, rather than the gospel antidote of our grace-union with Christ.”² He goes on to argue that the Church must present to the world the *whole* Christ, “clothed in his gospel.”³ Jesus is both the Holy One and the merciful One. He cleanses the temple yet eats with sinners. He gives Martha teaching on truth (John 11:25-26), yet He gives Mary only tears (John 11:35) even though they had both said the same thing to Him about their grief (John 11:21, 32). He gives each of them what they most need at the moment. On the cross Jesus fulfills both the unyielding demands of the Law yet also the most wonderful purposes of God’s love.

And so, we must present “the whole Christ” when we both pastor individuals and speak to the world about sexuality and gender today. Jesus is full of grace *and* truth. In pastoral care we must not apply the truth so harshly as to be callously alienating or so indirectly that the truth is never clearly grasped.

The very form of the following Twelve Statements seeks to capture this “grace and truth” wholeness as we address the issues. Each statement is dual, an associating of one truth with a concomitant truth or teaching. The aim is not to achieve some kind of abstract intellectual balance or “third way,” but rather to show the path of theologically rich pastoring. The paired truths help the pastor avoid the opposite errors of either speaking the truth without love or trying to love someone without speaking the truth.

The “grace and truth” path to which we point the Church in this Report is not an easy one. Speaking the truth yet doing it in love is nearly always harder than separating these needed aspects

2 Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 86.

3 *Ibid.*, 46.

of the whole gospel into two alternatives. Speaking with grace and truth, in the process of our work together this year, we on your Ad Interim Committee have been delighted to find a greater spirit and degree of oneness amongst ourselves than we would have expected. Our prayer is that our entire church may increasingly find that same “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).