

Gender, Sexuality, and Marriage

Western societal norms have changed significantly over the last few decades in regard to gender, sexuality, and marriage, even within some parts of the broader Christian world. However, at The Table, we follow the Scriptural directive, *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world"* (Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15), choosing instead to follow the instructions of the Scriptures regarding these and other important issues.

Before we define where we stand as a church on gender, sexuality, and marriage, it is imperative that we recall the teaching of Jesus regarding the two most important commandments:

[A teacher of the law asked Jesus], *"Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*
Mark 12:28-31

So, the second most important commandment in the entire Scripture is to love others. Therefore, we believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Leviticus 19:18; Luke 6:31; 1 John 2:10-11; 3:18). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture or with the doctrines of The Table.

"Sin" can be defined as missing the mark that God has placed before us in the Scriptures. Avoiding sin is not easy, but sins related to human sexuality often seem to be even more difficult than other types of sin. God offers us his Spirit as our help and our comfort in the midst of our struggles, and self-control is one of the fruits that can come from the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:16-24).

We understand that some faithful Christians struggle with same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria. For some children and teens, this is a phase that goes away; for others, it is a life-long struggle. We believe that such an attraction or struggle in itself is not a sin; rather, acting on those feelings is a sin.

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as either male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God and are created for human good and human flourishing (Genesis 1:26-27). As such, the rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

Same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria may seem even more difficult to master than other sexual sins, because they are so connected to our perception of our own identity. However, despite what the world may say, as followers of God, we are told that our

identity is found in Him, as His children, as new creations, and as His workmanship created to do what He desires (1 John 3:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10). We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning: a covenantal, sexual, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:3-6). We also believe that God's Word requires fidelity within this covenant and chastity outside of it (Leviticus 20:10; 1 Corinthians 6:18, 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4).

We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including, but not limited to, adultery, extra-marital sexual behavior, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, polygamy, polyamory, bestiality, incest, masturbation, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (Leviticus 20:10-16; Matthew 15:18-20; Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:3).

In fact, Jesus raises the bar on this restriction on sexual conduct by instructing us to even flee from lust, as that constitutes adultery of the heart (Matthew 5:27-28; James 1:12-15). The life of a Believer should be spent pursuing righteousness and purity, not pursuing our own lusts and desires (1 John 2:15-16; Philippians 4:8; 2 Timothy 2:22). Sin lurks at the door and desires to pull us down (Genesis 4:7), however we believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess, repent, and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-21; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 John 1:9).