

Appendix B

Elder Manual

First Baptist Church Elk Grove, California Date Adopted: September 11, 2008

Position Statement Concerning Human Sexuality

The Bible and Human Sexuality

We believe the Bible is God's Word given by divine inspiration, the record of God's revelation of Himself to humanity. (II Timothy 3:16). It is trustworthy, sufficient, without error--the supreme authority and guide for all doctrine and conduct (I Peter 1:23-25; John 17:17; II Timothy 3:16-17). It is the truth by which God brings people into a saving relationship with Himself and leads them to Christian maturity (John 20:31; I John 5:9-12; Matthew 4:4; I Peter 2:2). (FBC Articles of Faith, Article1)

First Baptist Church believes that the Bible is the supreme authority and guide for all doctrine and conduct. Accordingly, we have no authority to sanction or approve sexual conduct that the Bible defines as sinful. The Bible's attitude toward sexuality can be traced back to the creation of the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden. Two parallel passages in Genesis provide the basis for understanding all specific prohibitions against sexual activity outside the bond of marriage between a man and a woman:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth . . ." (Genesis 1:27-28.)

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." . . . So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:18; 21-24.)

Sexual relations within the bond of marriage can strengthen trust and intimacy between husband and wife, bring pleasure to both spouses and are necessary for procreation. In short, sexual relations within marriage, when lovingly exercised, are a gift from God.

Sexual relations outside the bond of marriage distort God's original intention and corrupt the relationship between men, women and their Creator. Following the creation of the first man and his wife on the sixth day, the Scripture says: *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.* (Genesis 1:31.) There is nothing in Scripture that provides a basis for making this pronouncement on any other form of sexual expression.

Based on God's Word as revealed in Scripture, it is the position of First Baptist Church that:

Legitimate sexual relations are exercised solely within marriage. (Genesis 2:18-24; I Corinthians 6:9-20; Hebrews 13:4) Hence, any other sexual activities violate the teachings of the Bible and First Baptist Church. These include, but are not limited to, (i) adultery, fornication, incest, homosexuality, pedophilia and bestiality (see Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:6-23; Romans 1:26-27; & I Corinthians 6:9-10); and (ii) lascivious (sensual) behavior, the creation and/or distribution and/or viewing of pornography, and efforts to alter one's gender, or the appearance of one's gender (see Mark 7:20-23; Galatians 5:19-21; Matthew 5:27-28; & Deuteronomy 22:5). Marriage has been ordained by God. This church recognizes marriage exclusively as the legal union of one man and one woman in a lifetime commitment. (Mark 10:6-12)

Escaping the Bondage of Sexual Immorality

The bondage of sexual immorality can be extremely difficult to break. God, however, is able to break that bondage through the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. 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. (I Corinthians 6:9-11.)

Escaping the bondage of sexual immorality will not be an easy journey. A believer who is caught in that bondage must rejoice in God's love toward him and realized that he can grow in his faith even while he struggles.

The following are some basic processes, each of which takes time. One step may blend into another, or may need to be repeated. God is able to deliver everyone from both immoral desires and actions.

1. Come to Christ as you are. All of us must bask in the love of God; we all must be willing to open our lives to His grace, for he sees our deceitful hearts.

2. Be willing to let God change you. The sinner's real enemy is his ignorance of the fact that he can be helped, which leads him to shun treatment. When Christ asked the man, "*Do you want to be made whole?*" He was not asking an idle question. If Christ were to heal him, he would have to accept responsibility for some radical adjustments in his lifestyle. Thus, to be free from sexual sin, one must ask: *Am I willing to let God make the changes He desires?*
3. Repent of any bitterness toward God or others. Sexual immorality is sometimes accompanied by bitterness toward God or others, often members of one's own family. Letting go of bitterness may be an important step in escaping the bondage of sexual immorality.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

None of us are truly repentant until we realize that we are held responsible for our failure to obey God. God's grace always comes through full contrition and humility.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:17)

4. Break the power of the illicit sexual experiences. The person who has had sexual experiences outside of marriage has been united to someone in an alien relationship. The power of those memories must be broken, so that the compulsion to repeat the behavior is erased. That can be done through renunciation; God is able to purify our memories, or at least to "break the power of canceled sin."
5. Find a counselor, accountability partner and/or support group. Breaking the power of sexual sin can be very difficult without help from, and accountability to, other Christians. Moreover, sexual sin often leaves scars that may require the help of a trained counselor. The Church's Staff and Elders can assist you in finding a counselor, accountability partner, or support group.
6. Understand the fact of temptation and be on your guard. We will always be tempted to repeat behavior that at one time was our master. Even if you believe you have overcome past sins, remain on guard and avoid any situation that might give rise to temptation.

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (I Corinthians 10:12)

7. Be prepared to believe what God says about you as a Christian. The moment a person becomes a Christian, he receives a new identity in Christ. The Christian who struggles with sexual sin is "in Christ," with all rights and privileges that accompany such a change. The key to overcoming any sin is for us to disbelieve what our emotions and thoughts tell us and to believe what God has said about us. Memorizing scripture, though not a cure-all, is helpful in changing these thought patterns.
8. Be prepared for spiritual warfare. Our Enemy, Satan, will overlook no opportunity to attack you at your weakest point. Be prepared for such attacks, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit and support from fellow Christians.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith . . . (I Peter 5:8-9)

Practical Application

Sexual immorality is the fruit of our sinful nature, not the root of it. There are other sins and attitudes that God may have to deal with in order for us to be free. For example, God may need to work at one's pride and covetousness before he can work on one's sexual desires.

When sexual immorality reigns in a person's life, he cannot break its power. But Christ broke sin's power. Deliverance from sin is not something to be worked for, it is to be received through Christ. Christ does not expect sinners to change themselves. He only expects them to believe the Word of God. If we think God cannot change us, we make him a liar. Even if we fall ten times in a day, God is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us, if we confess our sins to him.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)

Failure should never discourage us. The basis on which God forgives us is the atoning death of his son Jesus Christ, not our own goodness. Continual cleansing comes with continual confession. There is no sin that is too great for God; he can cleanse us from all sins.

Our Response

1. Self-righteousness has no place in a Biblical response to sexual sin, or any other kind of sin. Not all of us have fallen into sexual sin, but all of us are sinners in need of God's grace. The Church must confront sin when it comes to light, but we cannot do so with an attitude of self-righteousness.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

2. A Biblical response to sin requires humility and must have as its goal the restoration of the sinner. The goal of confronting sin is to restore the sinner to a right relationship with God, with his family and with his friends. Restoration must be done with gentleness and humility, recognizing that we also may be tempted.

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6:1-3)

3. A Biblical response to sin differs, depending on whether the person is a believer or a nonbeliever. The Church must confront unrepentant sin in those who profess to be believers, or risk erosion of its own values and, ultimately, God's judgment. The Church does not, however, judge nonbelievers, nor seek to separate itself from them. The Great Commission compels us to reach out to nonbelievers in love, recognizing that their primary need is to receive God's grace through Jesus Christ.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." (1 Corinthians 5:6-13)

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13)

The leadership of First Baptist Church is committed to following God's perfect plan for sexual purity, first within the ranks of the Church's leadership, and also among the Church's members and believing attenders. Confrontation of sexual immorality will always take place with the goal of restoring the sinner in accordance with the Scriptures and the *Restoration Process* adopted by the Elders of First Baptist Church.

This Position Statement may be amended only by formal action of the Elders of First Baptist Church.

Replaces Prior Statement: *Position Statement regarding Homosexuality*, dated August 1998