



Queensland Baptists

Position Statement on Sexuality and Marriage

Adopted by QB Assembly 10.04.2015
Confirmed by Ministerial Services 16.04.2015

Introduction

In Matthew 19:5 Jesus affirmed the teaching from Genesis that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Such an understanding of God’s intent for marriage is also affirmed in Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 5:31. Accordingly, we believe that those who follow Jesus should also affirm that marriage is between a man and a woman. We will continue to hold this belief even if the legal definition of marriage is changed at some time in the future.

Background

The past few decades have seen a number of dramatic shifts in the social and moral fabric of Australian society as a result of the growing embrace of relativism, pluralism, individualism, and nihilism within most Western societies. Among the many social changes which have confronted and challenged the church during this time are the enduring impacts of the 1960s “sexual revolution”, and the more recent push, not only for the legalisation of same-sex relations (as provided for by each of the States and Territories of Australia since the early 1990s), but also the recognition of same-sex marriage. How has, and how should, the church respond to these dramatic shifts in the social context in which we are called to live as “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-14)?

Churches which form a part of the Baptist Union of Australia have generally responded to these issues with one voice, affirming the Scriptural teaching that “among you [the community of faith] there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality” (Ephesians 5:3a). The word used here for “sexual immorality” is the word “πορνεία” or “*porneia*” which was used to describe the broad range of sexual sins, including illicit sexual intercourse, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, and intercourse with animals. Thus, even in the face of the pressures of the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s Baptists continued to affirm their opposition to pre-marital sex and adultery (extra-marital sex). It has been the conviction of Baptists that, regardless of the accepted norms and behavioural standards of society, as a community of faith we are called upon to submit to the “higher authority” of the Scriptures when it comes to our social and moral choices.

Our Authority

According to the 2001 Queensland Baptists Guidelines for Belief and Practice, we hold “The Bible, as the true record of God’s revelation, [and affirm that it] is the supreme written authority for our faith and practice”. With this in view, we are not compelled by the changing social and moral views of Australian society to relinquish our commitment to the biblical teaching on subjects such as sexuality, marriage, and the family, though we strongly desire to remain in constructive and compassionate conversation with our society.

Our Convictions

While some within the wider Christian community have felt compelled by the Christian imperative of love to revise their biblical and theological convictions about sexuality and marriage by the application of a variety of hermeneutical principles which allow them to accommodate changing cultural norms, we affirm our convictions on the biblical teachings about sexuality and marriage. These biblical teachings concerning marriage are focused around four normative principles:

1. Monogamy – God’s original intention was that marriage was to be consummated between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Ephesians 5:31)
2. Commitment – God’s intention is that marriage involves a voluntary and lifelong commitment between a man and a woman (Matthew 19:4-6; cf Mark 10:6-9, Malachi 2:14)
3. Equality – God’s intention is for equality and mutuality between a husband and his wife (1 Corinthians 7:4)
4. Fidelity – God’s intention is that the only legitimate place for sexuality intimacy is within the commitment of marriage (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

In addition, we believe that, according to God’s pattern, children are best raised and nurtured in the secure environs of the marriage relationship where they have input of both a mother and a father (Ephesians 6:1-4). Thus, we hold to the position set forth in the Marriage Rites of the Baptist Union of Australia (2011) which affirms that “The Baptist Union of Australia defines marriage as being the union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.”

Implications for Ministry

In a culture where societal norms regarding sexuality and marriage may change, we as Queensland Baptists affirm our responsibility to live lives that are “blameless and pure” as we lovingly “shine like stars in the universe hold[ing] out the word of life” (Philippians 2:15-16a). We would also humbly acknowledge, however, that while this is our aim, even as God’s people we often still struggle, failing to live up to the standards we espouse. As we do so, we come before God and one another in confession, seeking the help of God and others to live according to his word. Therefore, while on the one hand we acknowledge that sexual immorality in its many and varied forms is contrary to God’s design and desire, we continue to offer a humble and loving concern for all people regardless of their views on sexuality and marriage. Thus, we do not seek to stand in condemnation of those who have embraced sexual lifestyles which we believe are contrary to the biblically accepted expressions of sexuality and marriage. Yet at the same time we do not in any way endorse such lifestyles. We believe that the gospel, properly understood, brings the conviction of sin and, humbly embraced, guarantees not only our cleansing from sin and the gift of eternal life, but also the power to deliver us from sin (Romans 1:16).

Some would argue that while we may seek to proclaim biblical standards for those who belong to the church, we as Christians have no business in seeking to impose our views of ethics and morality on the wider society. By appealing to the concept of “the separation of church and state”, those who make such a case will often argue that, since Australia is a secular liberal democracy, the church should be excluded from any public policy debates and input into the legislative process. However, the Scriptures affirm that God’s people have a responsibility towards the wider society in which they are placed. In Jeremiah 29:7 God’s people were told that they should “seek the peace and prosperity of the city” to which God had sent them. While the concept of “the separation of church and state” was originally designed to prevent the state from interfering with matters of faith and practice, it did not preclude the church from having a voice into the public square. Therefore we believe that the church has a responsibility to graciously and yet firmly present the case for the biblical position on sexuality and marriage as being that which will always be in the best interests of society as a whole. This is at least part of what it means to live as “salt and light” in this world. However, at the end of the day, the church must acknowledge that the state may or may not endorse laws which affirm its convictions about issues of sexuality and marriage. Regardless to the State’s definition of marriage we will continue to affirm our position on marriage as set forth in this paper.

Implications for those preparing for and engaged in Ministry

It is incumbent upon all those who are preparing for or engaged in ministry to be actively seeking to live a life which is worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).

In keeping with the biblical convictions of Queensland Baptists, Malyon College and The Training Collaborative, as the Queensland Baptists entities specifically responsible for the training and education of those seeking ordination or appointment as Ministers or Pastors, we reserve the right not to accept the enrolment of those who are (a) living in a *de facto* or (b) adulterous relationship or (C) engaged in a homosexual or transsexual lifestyle. Such lifestyle choices are seen as being contradictory to sound biblical doctrine and represent a significant stumbling block to one's spiritual development.

In keeping with the biblical convictions of Queensland Baptists, Queensland Baptists Ministerial Committee will not register those who are (a) living in a *de facto* or (b) adulterous relationship or (c) engaged in a homosexual or transsexual lifestyle. However, this will not preclude those who have in the past engaged in any of these lifestyles, but now acknowledge them as sinful and are now committed to sexual purity and fidelity, since all of us, including those who seek Registration, are sinners before God who can only be made right before God through genuine faith and repentance.

In the case of those who are already Registered as Pastors or Ministers, but later move into a *de facto* relationship or adulterous relationship, or embrace homosexual or transsexual practices, their Registration with Queensland Baptists will be withdrawn.

Implications for Constituent Churches

While acknowledging the independence of the local church, Queensland Baptists strongly recommends that churches not appoint people engaged in these practices as leaders within their churches. We note the admonition given by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 concerning those who wilfully engage in sexual immorality and his subsequent call for restorative love and forgiveness in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. In Galatians 6:1 the Apostle Paul also urges the church, "if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." Queensland Baptists also affirms its belief that the local church should seek to lovingly minister to all people, including those who have embraced sexual lifestyles which we believe are contrary to the biblical teaching on appropriate expressions of sexuality and marriage.