



FIRST FREE POLICY REGARDING SEXUALITY

(February 9, 2006)

God's creational intent for our sexuality is good. We believe that God created us as sexual beings, male and female, to reflect God's image. We also believe that the Bible teaches there are two appropriate lifestyles which express God's intention for human sexuality. One is fidelity in the marriage between a man and woman. The second is chastity in singleness. We also recognize that any restriction God places on the expression of human sexuality is to protect us and the good gifts that God graciously gives to us.

Recognizing that we all struggle with sin, First Free will provide an environment that welcomes people who struggle with sexual sin. We will seek to love all people in Jesus' name, pointing them towards Christ's power to forgive and heal. While the Bible teaches that those who engage in sexual sin, sin against their own body we also recognize that sexual sin is not characterized in Scripture as being more severe than other forms of sin.

We will seek God to discern ways that we can directly and indirectly minister and share God's love with those who struggle with every kind of sin. We also recognize that there is a difference between temptation and behavior and while temptation is sometimes unavoidable we are responsible for our behavior.

We will not affirm for membership or positions of leadership, any who have **willfully** chosen to ignore or disobey God's design for sexuality as stated above. We will seek to be consistent in following this policy for any in the church who are involved in other forms of intentional disregard of Scripture.

First Free believes that God's intent is restoration. To assist people in this process our small groups will play a key role in providing loving, supportive and accountable relationships for those struggling with sin. As appropriate, the leaders of First Free may refer individuals who struggle with any form of sexual sin and/or compulsive behavior to specialized groups (within or out of the church) that focus on healing for a particular problem or issue.

The elders call upon our entire church to demonstrate maturity by living out the Biblical mandates truth and grace.

APPLICATION OF CHURCH'S SEXUALITY POLICY

June 15, 2006

In order to apply our church's sexuality policy to the ministry at First Free the elders are making a distinction between "task" and "discipleship" ministries. We consider "task" ministries to be those many items that need to be done to help our church effectively function. Task ministries are functional in nature; providing a helping hand with actions or services essential to the ongoing ministry of First Free. Examples of these task ministries are:

- Hospitality: Preparing and serving food and refreshments for adults and children, parental rotation in the nursery
- Beauty & Comfort: Cleaning, maintenance, repairing
- Administration: Office jobs such as stuffing and folding bulletins
- Special Events: Set, set-up, tear-down for events,

"Discipleship ministries" are as those ministry responsibilities such as staff positions, director positions, teachers, worship leading, preaching and positions in which people publicly represent our ministry or are teaching the Bible and/or doctrine. We recognize this as a broad distinction and understand some ministry positions will require discernment to distinguish between the two. With that in mind we require the following:

All those in "task" ministries must:

- Be willing to participate in ministry training when required and be respectful of ministry policies and procedures
- Give consent and accurate information for a background check if working with children or other unique settings
- Be willing to abide by the guidelines set by the staff overseer or ministry coordinator
- Be willing to cooperate with the leadership team and to submit to the direction of the staff overseer
- Be faithful in honoring the commitment to serve (For example, many ministries will require arranging for a substitute at least 24 hours in advance of a commitment if unable to perform volunteer duties.)

All those in "discipleship" ministries (such as staff, teachers, group leaders, ministry coordinators and other ministry roles of substantial influence) must clearly affirm or demonstrate the following:

- Follower of Jesus
- Personal growing relationship with Jesus and active personal prayer life, including actively praying for the ministry of Seedlings
- Desire to see people transformed by a relationship with Jesus
- Willingness to abide by the doctrine, ministry philosophy and policies of First Free and the specific ministry area where volunteering
- In some cases affirmation by staff or elders
- Past faithfulness

Biblical Philosophy for Application of First Free's Sexuality Policy **By Pastor Bill Shereos, Adopted by the First Free Elders on June 14, 2006**

Many at First Free have been in discussion of the application of our church's sexuality policy. The elders offer the following as an effort to sketch some Biblical and philosophical background for allowing those who are not fully devoted to Christ to participate in the life of First Free and engage in "task" ministries.

The Nature of the Church: Historically theologians have made a distinction between the Visible or Local Church and the Universal Church or True Church. The Evangelical Free Church of America's doctrinal statement makes this distinction and reads as follows. We believe:

Statement #8 "That the true Church is composed of all such persons who, through saving faith in Jesus Christ, have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the body of Christ of which He is the head."

Statement #9 "That only those who are members of the true Church shall be eligible for membership in the local church."

The local church comprises the local expression of the body of Christ in a particular location. The Universal Church consists of all those who through saving faith are trusting in Christ as Savior and are following Him. This is one reason First Free requires prospective members share their testimony. In so far as our elders are able to determine, we want to ensure that those who are members of First Free are genuine believers, saved by grace through faith and have a sincere intent to follow Christ. At First Free we consider those who make the commitment of membership to represent more closely the local expression of the body of Christ than those gathered on Sunday mornings. When we gather on Sundays to worship or assemble in our small groups for encouragement and support we expect people who do not yet know Christ to be part of the assembly. We even invite those who do not yet know Christ to our small groups, Sunday worship and other church events as part of our overall strategy in reaching lost people.

Scripture envisions unbelievers coming into the assembled gatherings of the church and while there having an opportunity to find faith in Christ.

1 Cor. 14:24 "But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while you are prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you.'"

We also believe that while it is our responsibility to ensure that genuine believers are welcomed into church membership there is no sure way to determine exactly who is "in" and who is "out" according to Jesus' parable of the weeds and the wheat in Matthew 13:25. Jesus concludes his parable with these words, "Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds, and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring them into my barn." Ultimately, only heaven can determine the exact composition of the Universal Church.

As elders we believe that we cannot condone sin and must hold up a Biblical standard of righteousness for our leaders and members. However, we are also called to welcome with open arms people who need to hear God's message of love and forgiveness.

The Ministry of Jesus: The ministry of Jesus portrays him frequently spending time with those who were considered outside the realm of God's love and outside the boundaries of the religious communities of his day. In Luke 14 after Jesus gave some of his most challenging words of discipleship, Luke 15:1 reminds us that "'tax collectors' and 'sinners' were gathering around to hear him." The religious community criticized Jesus' association with those who lived lifestyles considered shameful. Jesus responded with three successive parables demonstrating that God takes extraordinary measures to seek and save the lost.

In Matthew 9:9f Jesus was criticized for eating with tax collectors and other notorious sinners. When asked why he would associate with such people Jesus responded, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices. For I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough.'"

If Jesus made a point of associating with those some considered morally “less than” how could church do any less? And while Jesus always maintained high standards for those who would follow him by saying such things as, “*go and sin no more*” he made it clear by his associations that God deeply loves all people. We want our church to be open to all people. As a church we seek to follow the ministry and model of Jesus in associating with the “sick.”

Church Discipline: In *1 Cor. 5* the Apostle Paul makes it clear that a person in the church “*who had his father’s wife*” was to be put out of the church. This was an important principle because “*a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.*” Yet later in the same chapter, Paul makes it clear that these standards are clearly to be restricted to those who are actively full members of the local church (see above).

1 Cor. 5:9 “*I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people –not at all meaning the people of this world, who are immoral, or the greedy or the swindlers or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.*”

A church should reserve excommunication only to those who have voluntarily identified themselves with the church and then sin with a “*high hand*” (Old Testament terminology for those who are blatantly rebelling against God’s authority). Even at that, excluding someone from the fellowship of the church should only be done as a last resort after lovingly warning the offender. Church discipline is always to be done with a view toward restoration (*2 Cor. 2:5:5f*). The elders do not believe this kind of discipline is what is necessary for those struggling to overcome sin but rather for those who deliberately shake their fist at God and willfully reject his authority in their lives.

Qualifications for Leadership: In *1 Timothy 3* and *Titus 1*, the Bible lays out a very high standard for church leaders. Our elders believe that there is a higher standard of living required for those who are responsible to lead others. We do not believe that everyone in the congregation is to be held to the higher standard set for leaders. People are at various levels of spiritual maturity and need to be given room to grow in their relationship with Christ.

Spiritual Formation: As elders we believe that internal motivation directed by the Spirit of God goes much further than standards that are externally imposed by others. Often the Holy Spirit will convict a person of sin on God’s timetable rather than others imposing their own time table for the process of sanctification in another person’s life. Christians are at varying states of maturity and the greatest motivator for changed behavior is a response to God’s love demonstrated so clearly in Christ.

In our years of pastoral experience we have that found the people who experience the most profound and lasting change in their lives are those who experience God’s unconditional love for them in Jesus Christ. For example, after laying out the extent of God’s grace in the early chapters of *Romans*, Paul in ***Romans 12:1*** challenges believers, “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God –this is your spiritual act of worship.*” It is an understanding and appreciation of the greatness of God’s love that brings profound life transformation. Again, as Paul explains what is behind his ministry he appeals to the most profound expression of God’s love in Christ as a motivation for a changed life. ***2 Cor. 5:14*** “*For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*”

Sin has wrapped its tentacles tightly around all of humanity. Indeed, we are all locked in patterns and structures of sin that have gripped our personalities in ways we have yet to discover. It is God’s love and grace working through Christ and the personal work of the Holy Spirit in us that enables us to first look at the horror of sin in our lives and then enables us to change. Indeed, even in the lives of Christians, sin has entrapped us to such a great degree that it takes a lifetime of experiencing God’s grace and applying spiritual disciplines to our lives that enable us to continue to be transformed throughout our entire lifetimes. (*Galatians 5 and 6*).

Much more can be said on regarding this issue. These thoughts are offered simply to help understand some of the reasoning for our policy.

Homosexuality and a Christian Vision of Sexuality

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Essential Arguments for the Traditional Christian Teaching:

There is a broad and positive view of sexuality in the Bible. Further, the Bible teaches a general sexual ethic congruent with this basic positive stance toward sexuality. Moral condemnation of homosexual conduct is one among many specific aspects of the sexual ethic.

Biblical View of Sexuality: Human beings are *sexual, male and female, physical* beings by creational intent, and this was blessed as a creational good (“it is very good,” Genesis 1:31). Consummation of a heterosexual marriage in sexual intercourse has been viewed as creating a divinely-blessed and intended outcome, a “one flesh” *union* between wife and husband (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; I Corinthians 6:12-17). There is an objective nature to this union; we learn in I Corinthians 6 that sexual intercourse has fixed meanings or fixed outcomes regardless of the intentions of the actors. Sexual union between a man and woman appear to serve at least four purposes: *Procreation* (Genesis 1:28), *Union* (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:2-12; I Corinthians 6:12-20); *Physical gratification and pleasure* (I Corinthians 7:1-9, Proverbs 5:18-19); and *Instruction* about our incompleteness and dependence (Ephesians 5:31-33).

Sexual Ethic: The Bible speaks with a unified voice. The biblical options concerning sexual practice are two: fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness. The sexual behaviors and patterns which are judged immoral in scripture are, in rough order of their appearance: adultery (Exodus 20:14 and many other passages), incest (Leviticus 18:6-18, 20:11- 22), homosexual intercourse (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, I Corinthians 6:9), bestiality (Leviticus 20:15-16), rape (Deuteronomy 22:23-29), lust (Matthew 5:28), and fornication (I Corinthians 6:9 or Acts 15). While sexual sin may rightly be described as no different from or no-more heinous than other sins (after all, such sexual sins appear as one among many entries in the various “vice lists” in the Scriptures, Gal. 5:19-21), scripture also puts particular emphasis on sexual purity, urging us to “flee sexual immorality” and stating explicitly that sexual sin is unlike any other type of sin in that it produces a personal union disapproved by God and is a sin against our own bodies, which are the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:15-20). In summary, the Christian sexual ethic is:

- **an ethic of obedience:** God says “don’t engage in sex outside of the bounds of marriage!”
- **an ethic of loyalty:** Jesus states “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21). The Apostle John, remembering those words at the end of his life, wrote in I John 2:4 “The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”
- **an ethic of principle:** Sexual intercourse has a fixed, “objective” purpose, that being the creation and nurturing of a one-flesh union in a male-female married couple (I Cor. 6), and we violate that purpose when we misuse this gift.
- **an ethic of caution:** Deuteronomy 10:13: these rules are given for our good. The empirical evidence supports the contention that sex within biblical parameters is more likely to have beneficial consequences and less likely to have damaging consequences than sex outside of those parameters.
- **an ethic of virtue:** The virtues which we are urged to develop in scripture include self-control, purity, faithfulness, trustworthiness, and love. The cultivation of these virtues would make the likelihood of sexual sin diminish.