



RESOURCES

• Human Identity •

LGBT+ Rights

RESPONDING TO A CHANGING WORLD

This paper has been commissioned by EEA

January 2019

European Evangelical Alliance

office@europeanea.org

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www.europeanea.org

Introduction

The European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) offers this resource¹ to help Evangelicals to reflect on how to respond² to the LGBT+³ rights agenda in public life.

The paper includes brief theological reflections on sinfulness, sexuality and on how Christians should seek to influence the values and laws of our nations. It highlights the EEA's conclusions on its political stance on LGBT+ rights. It gives questions for Evangelicals to reflect on as they work out how they might speak and act, being Christ's ambassadors as they remain faithful to what Scripture says on sexuality and family life.

The Context

Across Europe, public attitudes on sex and family life have been changing dramatically for at least the last 50 years. In the West especially, nations have strayed far from a biblical understanding of sex and family and an often aggressive, secular culture makes it hard for any to oppose LGBT+ rights. People, especially children, are being hurt. Bible-believing Christians are called to proclaim God's good gift of family, based on monogamous heterosexual marriage as the basic and crucial relational unit in society.

While studies clearly show the health and other benefits of life-long, monogamous, heterosexual marriage for the couple, children and wider society, perceptions in many media and political circles and in much of society are different. People choose not to marry or their marriages break down. Laws on same-sex civil partnerships or marriages, fostering/adoption and fertility treatment for same-sex couples etc. are being introduced in more and more countries. Those who speak up for the biblical pattern are often viewed as judgemental bigots.

How should Evangelical Christians respond? Clearly, while others might reject biblical principles, this is not an option for us. The EEA believes that the Bible is clear in saying that any sexual activity outside the context of monogamous, heterosexual marriage is sinful. We should be confident in living by and sharing this conviction, knowing that God knows what is best for men, women and children.

Theology

The Christian view of marriage and sexuality is rooted in the creation account in Genesis 1–2. This is the text that both Jesus and Paul refer to when they teach on these issues (Matthew 19:4–6; 1 Corinthians 6:16). From the creation account, it is clear that every human being is made in the image of God, and therefore of infinite value and work. We can also extract several foundational truths about God's plan for human sexuality, such as:

- Sexuality, and our identity as men and women / male and female, is a good and God-given part of our shared humanity.
- The place where God has intended us to live out our sexuality is within a covenant relationship with a person of the opposite sex. This relationship – generally called a marriage – is to be marked by such things as:

¹ This paper has been produced with the contributions and comments of many EEA members and staff. It has been approved by the EEA Board and Public Policy Authorisation Team.

² This paper focuses almost exclusively on same-sex relationships and the public policy issues around these. For reflections on gender ideology and related public policy matters, please refer to EEA's Gender Issues position paper in the Human Identity section of <http://www.europeanea.org/index.php/resources/>

³ Lesbian, LGBT+, Bi-sexual, Trans and any other sexual or gender identity.

- Giving oneself over to the other person (leaving one's original family).
- Being sexually, emotionally and financially faithful to the other person (cleaving to one's spouse).
- Potential fruitfulness (marked by sexual complementarity).
- Implicit in the creation account, and explicit in Jesus' teaching, is also the idea that marriage should be life-long and monogamous (cf. Matthew 19:5–6).
- These truths are applicable to all men and women, as they are part of the creation order, and not just the people of God (cf. Leviticus 18:24–30).

Historically, the church's teaching on these issues has been an important contribution to society as a whole. It has led to fighting for mutual consent vs. the forced marriages of feudal culture, monogamy vs. the polygamy of Islam and other non-Christian cultures, and also heterosexual marriage vs. the gender-neutral marriages advocated by western secular culture.

At the same time, this has increasingly become a tough issue for the churches in the West, both because of internal tensions and because of the weakening authority of the Christian Church. In addition to this, many Evangelical Christians feel that their view of marriage has become a major obstacle in evangelism, making people turn their backs not only on the Christian view of sexuality and marriage – but sometimes also on Christ himself. This pressure, however, should not result in Christians changing their beliefs.

This causes us to reflect on several issues: How important are these issues to our Christian witness? What can we expect of non-Christians when it comes to ethical values rooted in Scripture? What are the limits of legislation, compared to the ethical standard of Christian discipleship?

No doubt, different Christian traditions answer these questions differently. The same is true of today's Evangelical community. This is not necessarily because of different views of Scripture, but rather because of different approaches to the issue of church and society. To what extent should the church try to "impose" its values on secular society? And should this come about through political means such as seeking to influence legislation, or through local churches organically influencing their fellow citizens? Or both of these?

There is no way that the EEA could speak with a completely unified voice in these matters. We will all value Scripture but our different cultures will mean that our strategy for upholding biblical values will vary. However, we want to share some thoughts, first on the subject of communication, and second on the issue of legal and policy positions on LGBT+ rights.

The issue of communication

The EEA believes that the Church's calling is to present the case concerning God's desire for family life to fellow sinners with grace, rather than in judgement. True, there is a place for warning – especially when society as a whole is leaving a creation-based ethic. But the main task for the Church should be to tell a *better* story than secular ideologists: to explore the beauty of the biblical vision of sex and marriage.

Christians are Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). Therefore, we are to do our best to represent Him, declare His message of reconciliation and demonstrate His character and values to the world. While Christ is beyond our understanding, our goal must be to represent all that has been revealed of Him, reflecting all of His characteristics, raising all of His concerns and, most importantly, communicating His offered free gift of salvation.

Therefore, we should ask ourselves if our words, tone and actions connected with our defence of biblical sexual ethics and family life reflect both God's grace and holiness. If not, something is probably wrong. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to stop sinning, but He did not stone her and instead asked her to repent and live a new life. He invited anyone without sin to throw stones – there was no one who could do so (John 8:1-11).

Do those who fail our perception of God's standard in sexual ethics or family life hear us communicating God's love for them? Do we show empathy for those who struggle to live up to God's requirements, while not changing what these are? We believe that a clear stance on the issues of sex and marriage should go hand in hand with a culture of grace, presenting the biblical vision with an open hand rather than in judgement. Worth noticing is that Paul told the Corinthians to be primarily concerned about morality within the Church, not to judge people outside of it (1 Corinthians 5:12).

What the Church may expect of Christians regarding sexual behaviour and family life is one thing. Here the standard should be high – while still practising a culture of second chances. Public law, however, is for all, not just for Christians. Old Testament law was for God's people. It still offers a pattern for how Christians should live now and it gives clear principles for what we should seek to persuade wider society to accept, especially when it comes to the Ten Commandments and creation ethics.

However, no country on earth is fully Christian, even if it may be blessed by Christianity's influence, and nor will it be fully Christian until Christ returns. Christians must seek to convince broader society of the wisdom of God's requirements. Government is a separate sphere from Church. It has a God-given role to serve all the nation's population, making possible peace, justice, righteousness and flourishing as people live in community with one another. With the prayer and work of Christians, we earnestly hope that any laws it passes will be greatly shaped by biblical values and standards.

The EEA believes Christians should advocate a balance between seeking laws that protect people from the harm of sin and that promote Shalom but also not seeking to compel people to be good through the law. This is especially so when it comes to the discipleship ethic of the New Testament. The Lord has made men and women responsible for their own lives, allowing us to make a mess of our lives – though He pleads with us again and again to choose Him and the salvation He offers. Plus, history teaches us the futility of government in free societies trying to impose law without substantive public debate and authentic broad popular support.⁴

The EEA observes that, in many nations, any attempt to oppose an aspect of the LGBT+ agenda receives a furious reaction. Whatever accusations are raised, we urge Christians to continue to speak with both gentleness and clarity. We are to be Good News People in word and deed.

1 Peter 2:12. "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God."

1 Peter 3:15. "If you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it."

Salt must remain salty. The light is to be on the lamp stand (Matthew 5:13-16). This implies that Christians' presence in this world will cause a reaction that should not be avoided through compromise. 2 Timothy 3:12 makes it clear that living a godly life will lead to persecution. At times we need to speak prophetically and boldly, knowing that some sections of society will not want to listen.

⁴ For example, the banning of alcohol in the USA in the 1920s, or the imposition of impossible levels of tax in many nations.

We know that God's laws are for everyone's well-being (Deuteronomy 5:29, 10:13). This is underscored by the fact that marriage is part of the creation order. However, society does not understand this. The EEA suggests that, when engaging in public debate and campaigning on LGBT+ rights, we should demonstrate the positive benefits of families based on life-long, monogamous, heterosexual marriage. We should also demonstrate the negative impact of a society that opposes the hetero norm, e.g. creating confusion not least among young people.

The EEA advocates for a civil public square, in which everyone, no matter their faith or worldview, is able to enter and engage public life on the basis of their beliefs but that they understand and respect the rights of everyone else to do the same.⁵ Therefore, of course Christians have the right to attempt to influence public policy on LGBT+ rights, especially on the level of creation ethics or natural law. We are simply adding our views to the market place of ideas, praying that people will understand their value and accept them. If the democratic process rejects our arguments, Scripture requires us to obey the law but to pray and work for a reversal. Our duty is to persevere in communicating wisely and graciously in ways that will persuade. By listening to our opponents and seeking to understand them, we may find that our message is received more effectively.

The EEA's Legal and Policy Positions on LGBT+ Rights

Human Rights law protects freedom of thought, conscience & religion⁶ and of expression⁷. This means that everyone has the right to believe and express their Christian views. Unfortunately, there have been cases where Christians' freedom of conscience has not been protected and they have lost their jobs for refusing to, for example, register a same-sex partnership or offer relationships counselling to a same-sex couple⁸. In some schools⁹ or hospitals, staff are put under pressure to teach or offer services which they would rather opt out of. Nevertheless, The EEA believes that profoundly held views should be respected and covered by freedom of conscience law and ways must be found to accommodate the rights of employees, as well as members of the LGBT+ community.

The EEA clearly objects to public policy that diminishes or damages in any way God's gift of life-long, monogamous, heterosexual marriage and of families based on this relationship.

The EEA recognizes that

- People carry responsibility for their own lives and have the freedom, under God, to live in ways that they choose for themselves, as long as they do not harm or discriminate against others.
- Same-sex relationships between consenting adults are legal in all European countries.
- Same-sex partnerships or marriage are legal and that same-sex couples have adoption and fertility treatment rights in many European countries. However, many European countries have made it clear that they will not be giving these rights to same-sex couples.

The EEA strongly resists

⁵ Article 16 of The Global Charter of Conscience. See www.charterofconscience.org

⁶ See European Convention of Human Rights Article 9.

⁷ See European Convention of Human Rights Article 10.

⁸ See the cases of Lilian Ladele & Gary McFarlane in the UK. The European Court of Human Rights did not agree that their human rights had been infringed when they lost their jobs.

⁹ For an explanation of human rights law in the context of education, see The EEA's position paper in the Human Identity section of <http://www.europeanea.org/index.php/resources/>

- The notion of same-sex marriage. If civil partnership between same-sex couples was clearly seen as sociologically and ontologically different to marriage, the EEA would not object. Indeed, the EEA would support civil partnerships being made available as a way of providing legal and financial security for people in long term, non-sexual relationships if they share lives closely, for example siblings. However, civil partnerships are only given to couples with a sexual relationship and, in most countries, only to same-sex couples. And these partnerships and same-sex marriage are seen in the same light and regarded as equal to heterosexual marriages in nations which have introduced them.
- The right for same-sex couples to foster / adopt children. Children need male and female role models as parents, they need parents who feel comfortable with their gender identity. Many children clearly do not have this benefit but this is still the ideal and should be the aim of good family public policy.

The EEA believes that

- It is vital to have a high age of consent for same-sex activity and age restrictions on any medical treatment to alter gender identity. Some children and young people are not clear about their gender or sexual identity until they are older. The EEA believes this is a child protection issue. It recommends protecting children and young people from sexual activity or gender reassignment treatment so as to give them time to work out their sexual or gender identity.¹⁰
- No community or organisation with a clear faith ethos must ever be forced into being involved in celebrating or recognising
 - same-sex partnerships / marriage,
 - fostering / adoption by same-sex couples,
 - fertility treatment for same-sex couples.

The human rights of both the corporate body, e.g. the Church, and the people of faith conviction within that body must be respected. People of all faiths have the right to reflect their beliefs within their communities, even when these communities sometimes serve public functions e.g. performing marriages or offering adoption services.

- Freedom of conscience at work should be respected, including in secular contexts. Therefore, there should be flexibility for those who
 - register partnerships or marriages in non-religious ceremonies,
 - arrange fostering, adoption or fertility treatment,
 - teach about relationships in school,
 - offer relationship counselling.

¹⁰ See the Human Identity section of <http://www.europeanea.org/index.php/resources/> for EEA's position paper and other papers on gender identity.

Employees should be permitted respectfully and discreetly to hand over responsibility for a particular ceremony, case or class to colleagues. The principle of reasonable accommodation¹¹ should be introduced so that everyone's rights are maximised.

The compassion of Christ lies at the heart of the Gospel. Therefore, in a plural society the EEA is broadly supportive of pension, tax and next of kin rights for long-term partnerships, be they between same-sex partners or best friends or siblings etc., anyone who shows commitment to sharing a home and life.

The EEA recognises a nation's right to decide for itself whether to introduce same-sex partnerships, marriage, fostering, adoption or fertility treatment. It objects to any international pressure put on countries to introduce such measures. In the context of a free and balanced media, a nation should be free to decide for itself through its own public debate and democratic processes.

While many are convinced supporters of the full range of LGBT+ rights, EEA demands that these people should recognise that others (individuals, organisations and nations) disagree and have a right to do so. However, no one should have to live in fear because of hatred or violence. EEA strongly opposes homophobia and urges Christians to stand up against it. Someone's sexual orientation is too narrow a way of defining them. Each person is made in God's image and, therefore, of infinite worth. All should be treated with dignity, all deserve to hear the Gospel and find freedom in Christ.

Questions for Christians to consider

How can our national Evangelical Alliance / Church demonstrate to the community, media and politicians the positive benefits of family life based on life-long, monogamous, heterosexual marriage?

How can our national Evangelical Alliance better prepare and resource the Church/evangelicals to remain biblically faithful and culturally influential in contexts in which the redefinition of marriage has fundamentally changed their relationship with the state?

How can our national Evangelical Alliance's better prepare and resource the Church to support children and young evangelicals to remain biblically faithful and culturally influential in the face of growing pressures to acquiesce to secularism and sexualism?

How can we improve our pastoral support for those struggling to live up to God's standard for family life?

How can we improve our pastoral support to heterosexual couples as they prepare for marriage and afterwards, including if they become parents so, that they can contribute to and enjoy family life as God intends?

We are Christ's ambassadors, seeking to represent His character and concerns. How should this shape our speaking into the public arena on any issue? In particular, how do we balance God's call to righteousness and truth with grace and humility?

How are members of the LGBT+ community regarded in our nation? What rights do they have? What rights would they like? In what ways do their rights claims affect freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the rights to a private life and family?

¹¹ Reasonable Accommodation is a legal concept, well established in North America, whereby, adjustments are made to accommodate an individual based on a proven need. The word "reasonable" is key. Both an employee and employer must be willing to find workable solutions in a respectful way. A solution should not be too onerous on colleagues or the organisations as a whole. Everyone's rights should be maximised.

Public discourse on LGBT+ rights can often become unpleasant. What safeguards will help us to remain confident and clear about what we believe should be public policy, while avoiding negative stereotypes or engaging in pointless exchanges?

While our nation may enjoy the blessing of a Christian heritage (past or present), nevertheless, there are many who do not wish to abide by biblical requirements on sexual behaviour or family life. What does it mean for Christians to argue for biblical standards, while also respecting the rights of people to live by their own, different standards? What is the appropriate language / apologetics for this in a democratic and plural society?

Other Resources

These resources do not necessarily represent the views of the EEA.

Evangelical Alliance UK [Biblical & pastoral responses to homosexuality](#)

Evangelical Alliance Sweden <http://äktenskap.info> Man & Woman. A resource page looking at sexuality, knowledge & Christian faith.

Evangelical Alliance Italy <http://www.alleanzaevangelica.org/index.php/news/attualita-italia/item/94-omosessualita-un-approccio-evangelico-documento-dell-a-e-i>)? An Evangelical Approach, including pastoral, social and ethical implications.

A [Christian understanding of sex and human flourishing part 1](#) 6 lessons with videos & discussion questions. By Forum of Christian Leaders.

[The Plausibility Problem](#) – the church and same sex attraction. By Ed Shaw.