

# Position Paper on Marriage

We believe marriage is a gift from God for the blessing of men, women and children and for the good of society. However, given the present practice of cohabitation outside of marriage, the prevalence of same-sex unions and the disintegration of marriages in our culture, we offer the following Biblical principles relative to the sanctity of the institution of marriage. In this position paper, we seek to think about marriage under the authority of God and His written Word, the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). We believe that God has revealed to all people, in all cultures, at all times, a sense of morality in the ordering of human relationships. Therefore, there is a moral imperative which governs all human relationships, including marriage.

## I. What Biblical Marriage Looks Like

### A. Marriage is God-ordained

*"So God created human beings in His own image.  
In the image of God He created them; male and female he created them."  
~Genesis 1:27~*

The very nature of the way God created human beings to live on the earth indicates He intended man and woman for each other. Their relationship was to be social as well as physical.

*"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.  
I will make a helper who is just right for him.'  
~Genesis 2:18~*

The first woman was a 'helper' (a counterpart) for the man, taken from his side, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, his perfect complement. It is obvious that God meant them to share in both privilege and responsibility.

### B. Marriage is Permanent

1. God intended marriage to be a monogamous union.

*"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,  
and they will become one flesh."  
~Genesis 2:24~*

When this is quoted in Matthew 19:5, a Greek word for *united* is used that means "to be glued to; to be closely bound to." The Old Testament factually recognized that polygamy did exist. It notes that the first case of polygamy was in Cain's line (Genesis 4:19) and shows that monogamy was still the ideal. (Psalm 128:3; Proverbs 5:18; 31:10-29; Ecclesiastes 9:9) Jesus also acknowledges that God's ideal in the beginning was monogamy. (Matthew 19:8) Scripture teaches that the one-flesh union of marriage constitutes an intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual unity. "So they are no longer two, but one." (Matthew 19:5-6) When the two become one flesh, the God-created individualities of the husband and wife are not lost; rather they complement and enrich each other. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul shows the marriage relationship is an analogy to the spiritual relationship between Christ and His church. (Ephesians 5:31-33)

2. God designed marriage to be a lifelong relationship. Jesus said, "What God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mark 10:9) The marriage covenant should be kept sacred and unbroken under those conditions stated in the Bible. Given the complexities and challenges inherent in the merging of two lives into one, pastoral counseling is required in the period prior to the marriage ceremony at Believers.

### **C. Marriage is between a man and a woman**

From Genesis to Revelation, sexual union in marriage is to be between one man and one woman. Scripture emphatically condemns same-sex unions and sexual intercourse between people of the same sex. In the Old Testament a homosexual relationship was a capital offense, and in the New Testament it is repeatedly condemned. (*Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11*)

## **II. Commitments Made in Marriage**

### **A. To God and each other**

Marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman and between the participants and God (*Malachi 2:14-16*). It is therefore more than a temporary agreement of convenience, a contract or a well-intentioned promise. When a believer marries, it is God's will that he or she should be united only with another believer. (*2 Corinthians 6:14*) Because the marriage covenant is to reflect the strength of God's covenant love for His people, (*Hosea 3:1*) any variation from His ordained decree is harmful to the participants and in violation of God's mandates for all people. (*Mark 10:11-12*)

### **B. To purity**

1. God-ordained marriage should remain pure in thought, motive and practice. The seventh commandment prohibits adultery. (*Exodus 20:14*) Jesus sets an even higher standard in his statement: "...*anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery.*" (*Matthew 5:27-28*) Furthermore, sexual relations outside of marriage are forbidden by Scripture. (*1 Corinthians 6:16-20 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4*) The Apostle Paul specifically commands believers to "*abstain from sexual immorality.*" (*1 Thessalonians 4:3*) In contemporary culture infidelity all too frequently occurs with tragic consequences. Thus, the author of Hebrews solemnly warns that "*God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*" (*Hebrews 13:4*) The modern axiom that "everyone is doing it, so it must be okay" is condemned by unequivocal Biblical teaching. Emotional unfaithfulness to one's spouse is equally sinful and hence, destructive to the marriage relationship. In order to strengthen their covenant relationship, couples are encouraged to seek godly and practical ways to enrich their relationship through marriage retreats, couples seminar or classes and pastoral counsel.

2. All forms of emotional and physical abuse violate the one-flesh covenantal relationship. We urge abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church and, as necessary, professional and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and to the marriage relationship.

### **C. To Submission**

God's Word indicates how husbands and wives should relate to one another in the home. Ephesians 5, verse 21 states that Christians should "*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" Mutual submission means that Christian husbands and wives must respect and honor one another, acknowledge one another's gifts, mobilize one another's strengths, and build up one another.

Out of reverence for Christ as Savior and Lord of their marriages, Christian wives are to respect and subject themselves to their husbands as to the Lord. And Christian husbands are to love their wives even "*as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*" (*Ephesians 5:22-26*) In such a marriage bond in Christ, husbands and wives seek together the Spirit's guidance in family decisions, in the nurture and training of their children in the Christian faith and in all aspects of the well-being of their family, and as a witness to the grace of God in their life together.

### III. Marriage is not for everyone

The sanctity of marriage does not negate the gift of celibacy. (*1 Corinthians 7:6*) While marriage is a great blessing, it is not God's will that all should be married. This was certainly the case for the Lord Jesus and probably for Paul. Singleness in Scripture is also a great blessing and offers unique opportunities for an undivided devotion to the Lord. (*1 Corinthians 7:1, v.35*)

#### Scripture References (New Living Testament)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. **2 Timothy 3:16**

Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was Zillah. **Genesis 4:19**

Your wife will be like a fruitful grapevine, flourishing within your home. Your children will be like vigorous young olive trees as they sit around your table. **Psalms 128:3**

Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. **Proverbs 5:18**

Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? She is more precious than rubies. Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She finds wool and flax and busily spins it. She is like a merchant's ship, bringing her food from afar. She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household and plan the day's work for her servant girls. She goes to inspect a field and buys it; with her earnings she plants a vineyard. She is energetic and strong, a hard worker. She makes sure her dealings are profitable; her lamp burns late into the night. Her hands are busy spinning thread, her fingers twisting fiber. She extends a helping hand to the poor and opens her arms to the needy. She has no fear of winter for her household, for everyone has warm clothes. She makes her own bedspreads. She dresses in fine linen and purple gowns. Her husband is well known at the city gates, where he sits with the other civic leaders. She makes belted linen garments and sashes to sell to the merchants. She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness. She carefully watches everything in her household and suffers nothing from laziness. Her children stand and bless her. Her husband praises her: "There are many virtuous and capable women in the world, but you surpass them all!" **Proverbs 31:10-29**

Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil. **Ecclesiastes 9:9**

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended." **Matthew 19:8**

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. **Ephesians 5:31-33**

Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin. **Leviticus 18:22**

If a man practices homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman, both men have committed a detestable act. They must both be put to death, for they are guilty of a capital offense. **Leviticus 20:13**

So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved. **Romans 1:24-27**

Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

You cry out, "Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows. Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce!" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife." **Malachi 2:14-16**

Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? **2 Corinthians 6:14**

Then the Lord said to me, "Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the Lord still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them." **Hosea 3:1**

He told them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery against her. 12 And if a woman divorces her husband and marries someone else, she commits adultery." **Mark 10:11-12**

You must not commit adultery. **Exodus 20:14**

And don't you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one." But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. **1 Corinthians 6:16-20**

Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery. **Hebrews 13:4**

I say this as a concession, not as a command. **1 Corinthians 7:6**

Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to live a celibate life. **1 Corinthians 7:1**

I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible. **1 Corinthians 7:35**