

RMBC Position Paper - Marriage

We believe that marriage is a gift from God which was designed and instituted by Him for the blessing of men, women, and children, and for the good of society. We also recognize, however, that this God ordained institution is under assault through the practice of cohabitation outside of marriage, the increasing acceptance of same-sex unions, the proliferation of unwed mothers and absentee fathers, and the almost casual manner in which so many determine to break the marital bond through divorce.

In response to this assault upon the institution of marriage the Elders of RMBC offer the following principles derived from the authoritative revelation of God in the Bible.

I. Marriage as a Human Institution

When God created Adam and Eve, He ordained marriage as the foundational institution upon which human society would be built (Genesis 1:27-28). In marriage, a man and woman leave their families of origin and become united as “one flesh” in a new family unit (Genesis 2:24). The judgment of Scripture is that marriage is to be honored by all (Hebrews 13:4). This means that marriage is not a “church” institution. It is, rather, a human institution, established by God the Creator all and binding upon all humanity according to God’s design.

Marriage is a covenant. This covenant is entered into by one man and one woman, but also between those who would become one flesh, and God (Malachi 2:14-16). It is therefore more than a temporary agreement of convenience. It is a binding relationship established by promises. As such, the marriage covenant is solemnly sealed by a ceremony witnessed by family and friends and regulated by the state. In the case of one who is a professed follower of Jesus Christ, it is God’s will that he or she should be united only with another believer (2 Corinthians 6:14). Because God has created and instituted marriage as a lifelong covenant (Matthew 22:23-30) and 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).

God ordained marriage for the following ends:

The Glory of God: Although marriage is a human institution, marriage exists first and foremost to glorify God. Even as individual human beings are image bearers of God (Genesis 1:26), so man and woman in marriage also display His glory (vv. 27-28). Marriage as a creation ordinance glorifies God as creator. Beyond that, however, marriage is to glorify God as redeemer, for Christian marriage is the consummate illustration of the redeeming grace of God in Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33). To the degree that Christians live out this pattern of God’s love through His grace in Christ (Ephesians 5:1-2), they witness to one another, their children, the church and to the world the gospel of God’s redeeming love in Christ.

We must not, however, place God’s glory and our good in opposition to one another, for they are not in opposition, but complementary. For this reason, marriage exists also for our good in the following ways:

Companionship: Genesis 2:18a teaches that “it is not good for a man to be alone.” Therefore, from the beginning God called men and women to promote mutual care and friendship within the marriage relationship.

Mutual Assistance: Genesis 2:18b adds “I will make a helper suitable for him,” reminding us that we are to be a help to one another in the marriage relationship. Just as each wife is to be a helper suitable for her husband, also, each husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25).

The Bearing, Nurturing & Training of Children: Genesis 1:28 and Ephesians 6:4 teach that the marriage relationship is for procreation and moral instruction of children (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

Promoting the Stability of Society: When the foundational human relationship of marriage is degraded, the result is the disintegration of the family unit and the unraveling of the cultural fabric (cf. Genesis 2).

Affirming the Proper Context of Human Sexuality: Hebrews 13:4 clearly teaches that sexual intimacy should be reserved for a man and a woman within the covenant of marriage.

II. Biblical Teaching in Regard to Singleness

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 perhaps for the apostle Paul.

Singleness in Scripture is also a great blessing and offers unique opportunities for an undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:1, 35). Consequently, those whom God has called to be single for His sake should be recognized and honored in the church of Jesus Christ.

III. Biblical Teaching in Regard to the Nature of Marriage

A. Marriage is Complementary

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 individuality of the husband and wife are not lost; rather they complement and enrich each other. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul demonstrates that this "profound mystery" is analogous to the spiritual relationship between Christ and His church. "I am talking about Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-33).

B. Marriage is Between a Man and a Woman

From Genesis to Revelation, sexual union in marriage is to be between a man and a 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).

C. Marriage is for Life

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 before any wedding ceremony may be celebrated under the auspices of RMBC.

D. Marriage is the Only Proper Context for Sexual Relations

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 maintain a consistent use of the means of grace including their private devotional life, consistent attendance at the public meetings of RMBC, and the seeking of godly and practical pastoral counsel.

E. When Marriage Goes Wrong

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. As necessary, one may choose to utilize professional and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and to the marriage relationship.

F. Biblical Roles of Husbands and Wives

God’s Word indicates how husbands and wives should relate to one another in the home. 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 to obey the instruction of the Spirit, as communicated in the Word of God in regard to family decisions, the nurturing and training of their children in the Christian faith and in all aspects of the well being of their family, together witnessing to the grace of God in their lives and marriage relationship. This relationship between the man and the woman in marriage is informed by the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity, where Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in essence, power and glory, while admitting different functional roles (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Conclusion:

The Bible teaches that marriage is a covenant, formal and sacred, and is to be held in honor among all people. Marriage is a serious commitment, involving vows taken publicly before man and God. The familiar text of the traditional wedding liturgy states, “Dearly beloved we are assembled here in the presence of God to join this man and this woman in Holy marriage, which is instituted by God, regulated by His commandments and to be held in honor among all.”

May the words of our Lord Jesus Christ rule in our hearts: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate (Mark 10:9).”