

## **City Church Network**

**March 7, 2023**

### **A Position Paper on Gender, Sexuality, Marriage, and Divorce**

The world and our American culture are quickly casting off all moral restraints in many areas of life. One of the most profound areas of life in which moral restraint is being legally, culturally, and politically removed is the area of sexual and marriage relationships, including the issues of gender and divorce.

God cares very deeply about these parts of life in the world He created, but the deep cultural force of tolerance and the ethic of individual freedom have been so absolutized in Western culture that they are beginning to encroach on the ethical beliefs of Christians at a fundamental level.

We do not want to surprise ministers, donors, or other constituents of City Church Network with our beliefs, so we want to express with as much clarity as possible our beliefs about gender, sexuality, marriage, and divorce.

As much as is humanly possible, we want to see what God sees, love what God loves, hate what God hates. We believe the Bible contains clear and ageless expressions of God's vision for relationships, including sexual and marriage relationships. Although there are some parts of the Bible which discuss gender, sexuality, marriage, and divorce which are not easy to understand and are heavily influenced by the cultural context of the period in which they are written, we believe that God's fundamental, timeless vision for sexual and marriage relationships is clearly presented in the Bible and can be easily understood.

We believe that the disagreement and division which have occurred among Christians about viewpoints on gender, sexuality, marriage, and divorce have not arisen because of lack of clarity about these topics in the Bible. Rather, we believe that the disagreements and division have occurred because, in our present age, the Bible's teaching feels extreme and unnatural and at times even painful. Therefore, it often feels easier (at least in the short run) to jettison some (or all) of the Bible's teaching about these topics and settle for beliefs which emphasize freedom of personal choice. Unfortunately, it is easy to demonstrate with a survey of history that following the Bible's apparently "extreme" and "unnatural" teaching about gender, sexuality, marriage, and divorce results in the greatest human peace, flourishing, and wholeness. Devastatingly, the opposite is also true.

Following is City Church Network's statement of belief about gender, sexuality, marriage, and divorce, with associated Bible references:

#### **Gender**

The Bible teaches that God created human beings male and female (2 genders). The genders of human beings can be discerned physically and genetically.

Obedience to God includes accepting God's design and purpose for individual gender as part of each person's individual calling in life. Only God has the power and authority to determine an individual human being's gender.

Each gender displays a particular set of divine characteristics and has unique responsibilities in life which are connected with gender. However, the quality and quantity of divine worth and glory ascribed to human beings is not derived from gender. Both male and female human beings are of great and equal value in God's eyes.

#### *Bible references:*

God created 2 genders: Genesis 1:27; 5:2; Matthew 19:4

Each person should remain in the calling given by God, which includes the calling from birth to a particular gender: 1 Corinthians 7:17,20,24; Romans 1:26-27; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 22:5

Male and female human beings have equal value in God's eyes: Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:22-33

### **Sexuality**

God created sexuality as one of the primary displays of His passion and vision for closeness and love between Himself and His creation, most notably His people. The depth of pleasure which is possible in sexual intimacy between humans who love each other deeply is a dim but real reflection of the depth of joy which can exist between God and His people.

Though God and human beings are not equal in attributes or value (God is far greater and more valuable than human beings), nevertheless, God has chosen to interact and relate with human beings in deep expressions of sacrificial love which are astonishing and breathtaking. God's character of being merciful, gracious, slow to become angry, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, maintaining His steadfast love for thousands of generations, and forgiving, is stunning and represents the primary and deepest characteristics humans long for in a Friend.

God created sexuality as a very special and sacred expression of love between a man and a woman, representing the differences between God and human beings. Just as humans are not equal in characteristics with God, so also men and women are not equal in characteristics with one another (though they are equal in value).

The Bible teaches that God's intention for sexuality between a man and a woman is designed to be expressed in the context of marriage (see the next section).

The Bible teaches that homosexuality is a distortion of God's design for sexuality.

Homosexuality distorts the vision for the inequality of characteristics between God and humans and because it is not able to produce the same long-term family commitments of child-bearing

which heterosexual relationships are able to produce. Long-term family commitments reflect the steadfast, faithful, and multi-generational love of God for His people.

The New Testament of the Bible uses the comprehensive Greek word “porneia” in multiple places to refer to all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, incest, pedophilia, premarital sex, and all other forms of sexual activity other than consensual sex between a husband and wife.

*Bible references:*

Sexuality is a metaphor for God’s relationship with His people: Ezekiel 16:1-14; Hosea 2:14-23; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20

God’s character is merciful, gracious, slow to become angry, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, maintaining His steadfast love for thousands of generations, and forgiving: Exodus 34:5-7; Psalm 86:5,15; Psalm 103

Homosexuality is a distortion of God’s design for sexuality and is therefore wrong: Romans 1:26-27; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10

## **Marriage**

The Bible teaches that God designed marriage and sexuality to be inextricably linked to each other. Because God’s character is both deeply intimate and passionately loving (reflected in the closeness and pleasure of sexuality) and also steadfastly loving, faithful over many generations, and forgiving (reflected in the long-term commitment and durability of a strong and healthy marriage), sexual intimacy and marriage are meant for each other.

Sexual intimacy without the commitment and durability of marriage will fail to reach the apex of pleasure it was designed for and will result in pain and suffering.

Marriage without passion and intimacy will fail to endure the difficulties which are inevitably encountered in long-term relationships.

Therefore, sexual intimacy is designed to produce joy and flourishing only in the context of a heterosexual marriage. Sexual activity and closeness outside of a marriage commitment is a distortion of God’s design.

*Bible references:*

Marriage is meant to reflect the character of God’s relationship with His people: Ephesians 5:31-32; Revelation 19:7; 21:2-3; Isaiah 62:3-5

Sexual intimacy is only good and pure when it is accompanied by the long-term commitment represented by marriage: Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18; 20:10-21; Romans 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 5; 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-24; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; Hebrews 13:4

## **Divorce**

The Bible teaches that God hates divorce. The reason God hates divorce is that God's design for marriage and sexual intimacy is that they should display powerful and deep parts of His relational character. Divorce is the breaking of a relationship, with all of its commitments and benefits, which is something God will never do with His people.

Husbands and wives should not get divorced.

If one spouse decides, wrongly, to divorce the other spouse who remains committed to pursuing a good and peaceful marriage relationship, the other spouse is permitted to grant the divorce after unsuccessfully seeking reconciliation.

Situations of abuse should be dealt with by seeking help from Christian brothers and sisters, staying separate for a while for the purpose of pursuing peace and restoration, and working toward reconciliation and reunification. The abusive spouse should be confronted for the purpose of calling for repentance and seeking restoration.

In situations of abandonment and unresolved abuse, divorce may be the best option for the abandoned and abused spouse.

In situations of divorce, which may occur despite efforts to prevent them, forgiveness should be extended and reconciliation should be sought.

### *Bible references:*

God hates divorce; husbands and wives should not divorce: Jeremiah 3:1; Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; 1 Corinthians 7:10-14,27,39

A spouse whose spouse is unrelenting in seeking a divorce may grant it: 1 Corinthians 7:15-16

Abusers should be confronted for the purpose of seeking repentance and restoration: Psalm 9:9; 10:18; 103:6; Ezekiel 34:1-24; Galatians 6:1, 1 Corinthians 5:11-13; 1 Timothy 5:20