

## **C&MA Perspectives**

### Singleness and Marriage

#### **God's Intent**

God created us to reflect His image individually and together in community, expressing our unity in diversity (Genesis 1:26–27). As a result, we flourish in intimate relationship with God and one another (Genesis 1:27–31; 2:25).

Singleness is a good gift from God as seen in the life of Jesus. It is an opportunity for focused communion with God, community with others, and service for God's purposes (Genesis 2:15; Matthew 12:46–50; 1 Corinthians 7:25–35).

Marriage is also a good gift from God for companionship, sexual intimacy, and procreation (Genesis 1:28, 2:24) where one man and one woman are joined together in a lifelong and exclusive holy covenant before God (Malachi 2:14–16; Matthew 19:4–6; Hebrews 13:4).

Marriage mirrors the unique relationship between God and his people (Ezekiel 16:8; Malachi 2:14–16; Ephesians 5:22–33). The best foundation, and God's intent, is that married individuals be united in their faith (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Whether we are single or married, Jesus empowers us by His grace to live fulfilled lives in relational intimacy with God and others (John 10:10; Romans 15:13; Philippians 4:10–13; Hebrews 4:15–16; 1 Peter 2:21).

#### **Our Fallenness**

Sin separates us from God and distorts intimacy (Genesis 3:8). Instead of serving others in covenantal relationship, we may use others for selfish ends. Any sexual activity outside the marriage covenant between a man and a woman violates God's boundaries and carries sober warnings and consequences (Romans 1:21–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Thess. 4:3–4). Failure to embrace God's intent for singleness and marriage may lead to apathy, discontent, sexual sin, or hasty divorce.

Within the faith community, we have also devalued singleness and treated divorced individuals with less respect. We repent where we have failed in these ways and grieve with those we have hurt by our actions. As ambassadors for Christ, we have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16–21). Christ has unbounded love toward us, no matter our past, and such love becomes the force behind our ministry.

We are committed to upholding and living out God's intent for relationships and supporting those who desire to pursue holiness.

#### **Divorce and Remarriage**

The redemptive power of Jesus can heal hurting people, strained relationships, and damaged marriages. Since God holds marriage in high regard, we seek to protect and nurture these relationships (Hebrews 13:4). Divorce causes significant pain and fails to reflect God's design; it should not be considered until reasonable efforts, with the help of the church and trusted Christian leaders, prove unsuccessful (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:4–8).

At times relationships can become so broken that divorce becomes an option, such as when a spouse is guilty of sexual unfaithfulness, abandonment, or significant abuse (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15; cf. Exodus 21:10–11). In such cases, singleness or remarriage can provide newfound hope and community. Remarriage is also permitted after the death of a spouse (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39) or when the parties made no profession of faith prior to the time of the divorce (1 Corinthians 7:15).

The complexity of divorce and remarriage has touched many lives today. Whether we were wounded by a trusted spouse or our own sin, God's grace brings us together on a journey toward healing, forgiveness, and freedom. Together we cling to the promise that any sin can be forgiven (1 John 1:9).

### **Our Hope**

In the new heaven and new earth, people will neither be married nor given in marriage (Matthew 22:30) but will exist in perfect community together with God (John 14:1–3; Revelation 21:1–4). Ultimately, marriage foreshadows the glory of heaven when there is but one Bride, the Church, and one groom, the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 5:31–32; Revelation 19:7–9).

Until then we are led by God's Word, forgiven by God's Son, and empowered by God's Spirit as we reflect His image together in community.

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear (fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people). Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:7–9).*

\* *Note: this statement is meant to be read in tandem with the Statement on Sexuality.*

While this Statement on Sexuality seeks to express the truth of Scripture, this truth must always be expressed with the spirit of grace found in Jesus Christ, who came to us full of grace and truth (John 1:16–17). Similarly, we ought to approach others with that same spirit of grace and truth.

### **God's Intention: Creation**

Sexuality is created by God and is good. We are created and embodied as male and female. In community we reflect God's image and accomplish His purpose in the world (Genesis 1:26–28). We are created for committed, intimate community, free from shame (Genesis 2:24–25). For a man and a woman, this intimacy may be expressed and consummated sexually when they are united as one flesh in marriage (Genesis 2:24). The pleasure of sexual union is intended to express not only a bodily intimacy but also an intimacy of heart, soul, and mind. The divine purpose for sexual union is to reproduce children who represent God and extend God's rule to the ends of the earth (Genesis 1:26–28).<sup>\*</sup> Our created sex and sexuality are gifts from the Creator to be embraced with gratitude and worship.

### **Our Distortion: The Fall**

Any rebellion against God's perfect design is sin. It separates us from God and distorts intimacy. All of us have experienced sexual brokenness in some fashion. No longer naked and without shame, Adam and Eve clothed themselves with fig leaves (Genesis 2:25; 3:7). Differences between sexes meant to complement have led to dysfunctional, domineering, neglected, and even abusive relationships (physically, emotionally, and sexually [e.g., rape and incest]) (Genesis 3:16). Some seek to redefine the created nature of our sexuality in rebellion (Romans 1:24–27). They desire the intimacy or pleasure of sex without the commitment of marriage between a man and woman (1 Corinthians 6:16; cf. Genesis 2:24), such as homosexual or extra-marital sexual activity. Others seek an illusion of intimacy through actively indulging in lust, fantasizing, and/or pornography. All of these are indicators of our rebellion against God.

In all the brokenness of our sexuality, the church has often failed to recognize, understand, or show compassion to those wrestling with these realities. Particularly, the church has struggled to walk in a redemptive manner with those who experience same-sex attraction and/or question their created and gendered identity. Because of the Fall, our struggles with sexuality cannot simply be reduced to our choices or environmental background, but our choices remain significant.

## **Our Redemption: Jesus**

God loves us in our brokenness with a love so boundless that He sent Jesus to redeem what sin had distorted. Even Christians who had previously embraced many sexual sins are now described in this way: And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11). These realities can be true for us today. There is nothing out of reach from the power of Jesus to cleanse and forgive when we turn to Him in humble repentance and submission. God floods our sexually broken world with grace and mercy to wash our sinful natures clean and makes us new creations in Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Out of forgiveness rather than condemnation, we are empowered to pursue sexual wholeness and freedom from the distortions of the Fall (John 8:11). God is restoring His creation, including His purposes for sexuality, through Jesus Christ, the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15–20).

As the Body of Christ, we walk together in our sexual brokenness toward maturity in Christ. We do so by speaking the truth with understanding, love, and compassion (Ephesians 4:15). While Jesus inaugurates the restoration of all creation, its full restoration is not yet realized. However, because of Christ's provision, it is our privilege to choose to "walk by the Spirit" and by so doing "not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16). We can experience the promised blessing that God desires to who will "fill [us] with all joy and peace as [we] trust in him, so that [we] may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). Therefore, we are freed from condemnation (Romans 8:1) and can overcome the power of sin (Romans 5:17) and Satan (Revelation 12:11) by the power of the cross of Jesus Christ!

## **Our Hope: Fulfillment**

While Jesus' death on the cross freed us from the penalty and power of sin, only His Second Coming will free us completely from the presence of sin. On that day, we will see him face to face (1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 13:12), enjoying a true intimacy without shame. The battle for purity will be won (Revelation 19:8), and we will be presented blameless in His presence with great joy (Jude 24).

\* While not explicitly included in the Genesis creation account, sexual union is for pleasure (Song of Songs). Furthermore, reproduction of people who represent God and extend God's rule to the ends of the earth is not limited to physical reproduction but also occurs through discipleship multiplication; the creation language of being fruitful and multiplying greatly is used

in the New Testament for how the Word of God bears fruit to multiply disciples (e.g., Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20; Colossians 1:6, 10).

### Sanctity of Human Life

The Word of God teaches that each individual is known by God from before the foundation of the world. Since all life exists for God's purposes and all human lives are equally sacred, it is our belief that human life is blessed of God and must be preserved and nurtured.

#### **God's Intention: Creation**

Human life is created by God and is good. Since we are uniquely created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and formed by God (Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4; Psalm 139:13–16), we hold to the sanctity of all human life (Genesis 9:6; Matthew 6:26). As best as we understand, human life begins at conception (Psalm 139:13–16; Jeremiah 1:4–5). It also lasts beyond death into eternity (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; 2 Corinthians 5:8–10). God gives life and breath to everyone (Acts 17:25), calling us to value equally the dignity of every individual life in its entirety, which compels us to love and have compassion for all peoples of the world (2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

#### **Our Distortion: Fall**

Sin affects every aspect of human life (Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 5:12) and devalues life (Amos 2:6–7; James 2:1–4; Galatians 5:14–15). God exposes and condemns these distortions through the life-affirming nature of the Law, as seen in the Ten Commandments that prohibit life-denying practices (Exodus 20:1–17). This degrading of human life leads to dehumanizing practices (e.g., abortion, racism, injustice, abuse, suicide, human trafficking, genocide, murder, and euthanasia). Since each person is made in the image of God, we grieve such practices.

#### **Our Redemption: Jesus**

Our life-giving mission is to proclaim Jesus in word and deed to the whole world (2 Corinthians 5:20; James 1:27). As our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King, Jesus brings new and abundant life (John 3:3, 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17), which transforms our distorted view of human life (2 Corinthians 5:16; Romans 12:2). We affirm the dignity of all people, especially the vulnerable and overlooked (e.g., the unborn, foreigners, the mentally ill, the poor, the elderly, widows, orphans, and the incarcerated (Exodus 23:9; Matthew 25:36, 40; James 1:27, 2:1–4; Hebrews 13:3). As the Church, we proclaim Christ by making disciples, and we express His

love by caring for people (e.g., disaster relief, refugee care, assistance for individuals with disabilities, foster care and adoption, community development, and elder care). At every opportunity, we seek to be peacemakers in our world (Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18).

We advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves (Proverbs 31:8–9; Matthew 25:45), protecting and honoring all human life. We affirm the value of every person from the womb to the end of earthly life, without exception. Therefore, the gift of life should be cherished and not taken prematurely. For the terminally ill, the ability to extend life artificially does not create a moral imperative to extend it indefinitely. Such decisions call for discernment as well as trust in the providence of our God.

Ultimately, God is the giver of life and numbers our days (Deuteronomy 32:39; Psalm 139:16; Acts 17:25–26).

### **Our Hope: Consummation**

Our hope for final victory over death is Jesus! Since Jesus rose from the dead and will return to restore all righteousness (Matthew 24:30; Titus 2:13–14), all will rise bodily from the dead and those who trust in Christ will live with Him forever (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:20–24; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Life, not death, will ultimately prevail, and Jesus will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4), fully vindicating the sanctity of life (Revelation 22:1–5).