

Position Statements on:
**Marriage, Singleness, Sexuality, and Gender;
Divorce and Remarriage; and
The Sacredness of Human Life**

Marriage, Singleness, Sexuality, and Gender¹

Based on the teaching of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments, Forest Hills Bible Chapel (FHBC) believes and teaches that marriage is an institution ordained by God from the foundation of the world and is intended as a lifelong union between one man and one woman. Along with many other Scripture references, this belief and teaching is supported foremost by the account of creation in Genesis 1-2. Genesis 1 narrates our origin story and how the one triune God created human beings in His own image and likeness, both male and female (vv. 26-28). The passage implies that a unity of one man and one woman is in some way necessary to fully represent the image of God in mankind.

Genesis 2 provides a more detailed account in which God created the first man, Adam, and decided that it was not good for him to be alone; so God made “a helper suitable for him” (v. 18 NIV). He brought all of the animals to the man, but none of them was a suitable helper. God then created the first woman, from part of the man himself, whom Adam later called Eve (“life-giver”), for she was the mother of all the living. God didn’t create a second man to be Adam’s helpmate or an assortment of women, but rather one woman. Together they were man and woman, husband and wife; and although naked, they had “no shame” or sin in their union with each other (vv. 15-25).

Jesus Christ reaffirmed the teaching of the Old Testament when He said, “Haven’t you read that at the beginning the creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matthew 19:4-6 NIV). God’s intention and ideal is that marriage should be a lifelong union.

The apostle Paul states in Ephesians 5:22-32 that marriage isn’t merely a human institution, but “a profound mystery” that as a special, divine metaphor illustrates the union of Christ and the church. For this reason also, only a union between a man and a woman can be a marriage, because any other so-called union between two men, two women, one man and multiple women, or any other variation or combination cannot and does not embody the image of God, male and female, thus united as “one flesh” (Genesis 1:26; 2:23-24) to illustrate the profound mystery revealed in the relationship between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

While marriage may not work out for everyone, Scripture celebrates singleness as the only other good and lawful option. Now that human life must be lived outside the garden of Eden, we all live in a broken world with brokenness in our relationships (Genesis 3-4). But with the promises of God in the Scriptures and the life and redemption we have in Jesus Christ, along with the power and presence of God in our lives through the indwelling Holy Spirit, everyone who believes has a future, a hope, and a family. Serving the Lord and His people in the church and in the wider world involves the stewardship of our gifts, abilities, and opportunities while living a life connected to others as we love God supremely and our neighbors as ourselves, which is how transformation occurs and maturity develops in us as we find and fulfill our purpose in God’s forever family.

¹ Some material taken and adapted from Upper Peninsula Bible Camp position statement (accessed November 2, 2023).

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul advocates for singleness as an opportunity to serve Jesus from a greater capacity of time and focus. Yet the state of affairs in which we find ourselves in this world means that some men and women never marry and instead serve the Lord in life as single persons who are “concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how [they] can please the Lord, that they “may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord” (vv. 32, 35 NIV); whereas, other men and women marry and serve the Lord in life as married couples, concerned about how they may please one another as husband and wife (vv. 33-34), ideally while having children and raising a family (Genesis 1:28; 9:1, 7). Yet as happens to all of us eventually, someone dies whether a spouse or dear friend, leaving the remaining spouse widowed or surviving friend alone. All of these situations, scenarios, and losses in life are why we need each other in the body of Christ as a church family so we can do life together through every season of life. Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20), so the moral vision and practical work of the church and our personal ministries within the mission of God means that there’s something for believers in every age and stage of life to be involved in with others for Christ in His vineyard as we see the fields ripe for harvest (Matthew 20:1-16; John 4:35). So the single life, like the married life, fulfills an important part of God’s will and plan for life in this world.

First Corinthians 6:9-11 condemns a variety of lifestyles including those associated with adultery, prostitution, and homosexuality. The Bible condemns all forms of sexual immorality and encourages Christians to flee from them because of their destructive effects, and because the physical body of the believer in Jesus is the temple of the Holy Spirit (3:16; 6:12-20).

Romans 1:18-32 declares that it’s not only sinful to engage in homosexual unions (vv. 24, 26-27), but also to approve of such sins in others or encourage their practice (v. 32). In order to maintain consistency with the Scriptures and integrity in our witness for Jesus Christ, FHBC cannot and does not sanction, approve, or promote adultery, fornication (a sexual relationship between an unmarried man and woman; i.e., “living together”), pornography, pedophilia, polyamory, polygamy, bestiality, transgender behavior, homosexual lifestyles, and the like, even if these behaviors are deemed permissible by civil government, other authorities, or culture.

Genesis 5:2 affirms that God’s original and ongoing intent and action is the creation of humanity manifest as two distinct sexes, male and female. With this foundational understanding of creation, FHBC cannot and does not support or affirm the resolution of tension between one’s biological sex and one’s subjective experience of gender by the adoption of a psychological identity discordant with one’s biological sex. Similarly, we do not support or affirm attempts to change one’s biological sex via medical treatment, surgery, or other interventions in favor of the identity of the opposite sex or of an indeterminate identity.

FHBC believes and teaches that masculine and feminine gender is uniquely based in and reflective of the image of the triune God. In fact, the capacity for interpersonal relationships and very basis for human community itself is rooted in God’s own nature. God’s triunity provides “the one and the many” as a unity (one God) with diversity (three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). We see this kind of complex unity in the institution of marriage (“one flesh,” man and woman), the church (one body, many members), and a country (one nation, many citizens). Therefore, male and female gender is an essential part of God’s creation and not to be altered by human will.

FHBC leaders sympathize with individuals and families facing the difficulties of being married or single, or of feeling confused, conflicted, or distressed about one’s human sexuality and gender, but we cannot conscientiously advise alternatives to biblical norms established by God as He narrates the story of the world in the Scriptures. With deep compassion, we aim to prayerfully come alongside anyone who is

struggling in order to encourage them to maintain hope in Jesus, seek God's strength, and remain committed to working toward a healthy view of being human in the image of God in our many relationships as His creatures. We aim to provide counsel and support to hurting individuals and families in hopes that difficulties can be resolved, confusion clarified, and our humanity redeemed.

Those who may have sinned sexually, whether single or married, or who have suppressed the truth about human sexuality and gender by their choices or lifestyle, but also sincerely repented and turned from their sin, we will seek to restore in a spirit of forgiveness and love (Galatians 6:1-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11). Each challenge faced consists of its own uniqueness and complexity to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. When abuse in childhood, abuse in marriage, addictions, desertion, or other destructive behaviors or traumas are part of a one's relational and sexual history, we will champion the truth about marriage, singleness, sexuality, and gender that God has revealed in Scripture while also seeing, hearing, and loving those who are hurting from deep wounds and broken hearts. We believe God can provide spiritually effective solutions and deep inner healing as we seek His wisdom, exercise gifts and discernment, and devote ourselves to prayer.

Divorce and Remarriage²

In Scripture, arbitrary divorce is considered a breach of covenant, an act of "violence" or treachery, which God "hates" (Malachi 2:13-16 NIV). Moses' clear instruction of what to do in cases of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) is only a temporary concession to human sin. Forest Hills Bible Chapel (FHBC) aspires to uphold and honor God's vision of marriage within our community (Hebrews 13:4) and before the watching world (John 13:34-35; 17:21), even amid those marriages where divorce seems imminent.

In being questioned by the Pharisees (religious separatists) about divorce, Jesus responds indirectly by speaking first about marriage (Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). By referencing Genesis 2, He reminded them that *human sexuality is a divine creation* and that *marriage is a divine ordinance*. He then said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6 NIV; see Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). In other words, marriage is not merely a human contract, but it is a divine yoke that God lays on a married couple by declaring this to be His will.

Moreover, Jesus carefully taught that Moses did not command certificates of divorce, as the Pharisees proposed, but rather he allowed such divorcements because of the hardness of their hearts (Matthew 19:7-8). This permission, as mentioned, was a concession to human sin, but certainly not a divine approval. It was a divine *concession* but nevertheless contrary to the divine *institution* of marriage.

Jesus' teaching on divorce may be summarized as follows:

1. A man who divorces his wife and remarries commits adultery himself and, because it is assumed that his divorced wife will marry again, also causes her to commit adultery;
2. a woman who divorces her husband and remarries commits adultery; and
3. a man (and presumably a woman also) who marries a divorced mate commits adultery.

But Jesus also recognizes one exception to this prohibition against divorce. He does not actually make an exception, but He recognizes that one exists. What is that exception? If the bond of marriage is already

² Some material taken and adapted from two sources: a paper written by former FHBC elder Fred Litty and FHBC member Gordon Church in the 1980s, which Dan Cooper transcribed into a version dated February 2004, plus another such paper by Lake Pointe Bible Church, "Position Paper on Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage" (Plymouth, Michigan, September 26, 2011).

seriously defiled and damaged by sexual infidelity on the part of one of the members of the marriage, a divorce is permitted (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). Presumably this is because it violates the “one flesh” principle of Genesis 2:23-25.

In the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai summarizing man’s moral obligation to God, the seventh commandment asserts the sanctity (holiness, inviolability) of marriage. God says, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:14 NIV). In other words, God’s people are to be totally excluded from the class of persons who commit adultery; and by positive implication, we are to support, strengthen, bless, and pray for married couples and their families. Moreover, while all sin violates the character of God (e.g., His love and faithfulness), adultery also violates the being of God (i.e., God’s triune nature—one God, three divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and the permanent relational bond shared within the Trinity is the reality that stands behind the “unity with a difference” that marriage is—one flesh, two human persons: man and woman). Moreover, marriage also reveals something about what God is like as well as pictures and reveals something of the profound mystery of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

It’s important to notice that Jesus taught that divorce for the reason of immorality was permissible but *not* mandatory. His purpose was not to encourage divorce for this reason but to forbid it for any other reason. This suggests we may need a different approach to the problem: “Rather than asking ‘is _____ a grounds for divorce,’ often the question should be ‘is _____ grounds for forgiveness, restoration, and/or counseling?’ ”³

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, the apostle Paul reiterates Jesus’ prohibition of divorce (vv. 10-11). Paul states that if a wife separates from her husband for any reason other than her husband’s immorality (see Matthew 19:9), she’s not at liberty to remarry because she’s not divorced in God’s sight. She is called to reconciliation or to remain single, but not to remarry. Yet in this passage, Paul also addresses a possible exception in the case where one partner is a believer and the other an unbeliever. Paul foremost instructs the believer to not divorce the unbeliever (vv. 12-13). He then goes on to say, “But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances” (v. 15 NIV).

One view of what the word *bound* means in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is that the believer is not bound to continue in marriage when the unbeliever is unwilling to continue the relationship (as detailed in verses 10-11). This view permits divorce under these circumstances but not remarriage (i.e., free to remain single or be reconciled). Yet given the conceptual parallel to a woman no longer bound in marriage to her husband when he dies (vv. 39-40), the other view is that the believer is not bound in regard to marriage (i.e., free to remain single or to remarry). This view claims that to be bound means to be legally married. This same idea is offered as an example in Romans 7:2, where Paul teaches that the death of Christ delivers the believer from being bound to the Law. Therefore, if the believer in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is not bound, he or she is no longer married and is free to remain single or to remarry, yet only in the Lord (v. 39).

Paul’s teaching is *not* that after conversion the believing partner is defiled by the unbeliever; just the opposite. Rather, the believer sanctifies the unbelieving partner (v. 14). Paul teaches that the believer should not take the initiative in divorce. On the contrary, if the unbelieving partner is willing to live with him or her, “he must not divorce her,” and “she must not divorce him” (vv. 12-13 NIV).

³ “What are biblical grounds for divorce?” GotQuestions.org, <https://www.gotquestions.org/grounds-for-divorce.html>.

Scripture appears to be silent about those who, as unbelievers, divorced for reasons other than immorality and subsequently remarried. This sin, like all those committed before conversion to Christ, is forgiven and the sinner justified. However, unresolved divorce and remarriage issues could affect a person's qualification for leadership in the church. The qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 require an aspiring elder or deacon be "the husband of one wife" (vv. 2, 12 ESV), that is, "faithful to his wife" (vv. 2, 12 NIV).

We also note that under the law of Moses, it was assumed that anyone permitted a divorce was free to remarry (Deuteronomy 24:2). Jesus assumes this same reason when permitting a divorce for the reason of immorality. Otherwise, He would not have spoken of marrying another (Matthew 19:9). Similarly, the parallel passages Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18 omit "except for sexual immorality" (Matthew 19:9 NIV) probably because everyone assumed remarriage was allowed in the case of adultery. Likewise, Paul implies that the unbelieving spouse of 1 Corinthians 7:15 will want to remarry without contest, given his concluding remark that "God has called us to live in peace" (NIV).

In view of these passages, God's intention in creating mankind male and female and in ordaining marriage is clear: human sexuality finds fulfillment in marriage, and marriage is a permanent and exclusive union. Human sexuality and sexual capacity should not be divorced from God's purpose for sex as the means of procreation. The blessing of children often follows the blessing of intimacy in marriage. Both pursued together are desirable for the relational well-being of the couple and the flourishing of the human race as they come together to enjoy God's good gift of sex and the mutual pleasure and satisfaction sexual intercourse can bring to husband and wife—all blessed by our good and faithful Creator and to His glory.

While divorce is nowhere commanded or even encouraged in Scripture, divorce and remarriage seem permissible from Scripture on two grounds: (1) a person may divorce his or her spouse if the latter has been guilty of sexual immorality, and (2) a believer may acquiesce in the desertion and divorce of his or her unbelieving partner if the latter refuses to go on living with him or her. In both cases, however, the permission is granted in reluctant terms. Only if a person divorces his partner on the ground of unchastity and marries another is that person not committing adultery. Only if the unbeliever insists on departing is the believer "not bound" as discussed above in 1 Corinthians 7.

FHBC believes and teaches that reconciliation is central to the Christian faith and that the way of Christ is the way of forgiveness. Even infidelity or desertion shouldn't lead automatically to divorce but may rather be an occasion for forgiveness.

FHBC leaders sympathize with couples facing difficult marriages, but we cannot conscientiously advise divorce. With deep compassion, we aim to prayerfully come alongside struggling couples in order to encourage them to maintain hope in Jesus, seek God's strength, and remain committed to working toward a healthy marriage. We aim to provide counsel and support to hurting marriages in hopes that the marriage will be restored. In cases where the safety of spouse and family is a risk, separation may be necessary.

Those who may have sinned in regard to marriage, but also sincerely repented and turned from their sin, we will seek to restore in a spirit of forgiveness and love (Galatians 6:1-5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11). Each marital challenge consists of its own uniqueness and complexity to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. When abuse in childhood, abuse in marriage, addictions, desertion, or other destructive behaviors or traumas are part of a couple's relational history, we will champion the truth about marriage, divorce, and remarriage that God has revealed in Scripture while also seeing, hearing, and loving those who are hurting

from deep wounds and broken hearts. We believe God can provide spiritually effective solutions and deep inner healing as we seek His wisdom, exercise gifts and discernment, and devote ourselves to prayer.

Sacredness of Human Life⁴

Forest Hills Bible Chapel (FHBC) believes and teaches that God created the universe and everything in it. The culminating work of His creative activity was the creation of human beings, male and female, who are made in His image. Therefore, from the moment of conception until natural death, human life should be cherished and protected. Hence, FHBC cannot and does not endorse nor promote dehumanizing and devaluing ideologies such as racism, sexism, classism, and elitism, or life-destroying practices such as aborticide (abortion), euthanasia, suicide, and the like (Genesis 1:1, 27; 9:5-6; Exodus 20:13; Psalm 127:3; 139:13-18).

FHBC leaders sympathize with individuals and families facing the effects of dehumanizing and devaluing ideologies or the consequences of life-destroying practices, but we cannot conscientiously advise alternatives to the reality of human nature and the gift of human life when God created human beings in His image and likeness. With deep compassion, we aim to prayerfully come alongside anyone who is struggling in order to encourage them to maintain hope in Jesus, seek God's strength, and remain committed to working toward a healthy view of being human in the image of God and living life in God's world. We aim to provide counsel and support to hurting individuals and families in hopes of helping people find forgiveness and healing.

Those who may have sinned by dehumanizing and devaluing other people made in the image of God, who have attempted to kill themselves or destroyed unborn human life, or who have suppressed the truth about human beings and failed to cherish and protect human life, but also sincerely repented and turned from their sin, we will seek to restore in a spirit of forgiveness and love (Galatians 6:1-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11). Each challenge faced consists of its own uniqueness and complexity to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. No matter what is in a person's past or history, we will champion the truth about the sacredness of human life revealed in Scripture while also seeing, hearing, and loving those who are hurting from deep wounds and broken hearts. We believe God can provide spiritually effective solutions and deep inner healing as we seek His wisdom, exercise gifts and discernment, and devote ourselves to prayer.

⁴ Incorporated items from Bair Lake Bible Camp and FHBC doctrinal statements (accessed November 2, 2023).