

Statement on Family and Marriage

An Official Statement of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada

1. Introduction

God is relational in nature and in His goodness and according to His likeness, He has created human beings to be in relationship with Him and with others¹. Identity, fulfillment and the path to human flourishing is founded on this relationship. God has given the family, through marriage, birth, or adoption, as a place to experience and grow in Him. Family forms a key relational context for the formation of society. It is designed to be a place of security and refuge, nurture and encouragement, giving and forgiving, instruction and correction, acceptance and love, mutual respect and honour, grace and blessing.

2. Theological Foundations for Understanding the Family

God is love, inherently relational, existing eternally as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those in Christ are given the right to be children of God. Through His atoning work they have been given access to the Father as adopted children². This is the believer's primary identity.

God instituted marriage and family in creation. Yet, in a sinful and fallen world³, no family perfectly fulfills the vision and calling for which family has been created. Thus, all families are in need of the redemptive work of Christ's grace in their relationships as they grow up into full maturity in Him.

3. Singleness

Whether called to a lifetime or a season of singleness, the single person has the opportunity of deep devotion to God. Their focus is not divided by marital responsibilities⁴. A single person is called to a life of celibacy for as long as they are single. God is able to meet the profound need for loving companionship and intimacy through His own presence, as well as through the family of God. Just as with those who are married, the church is responsible to care for, encourage, and equip single people who are part of the body of Christ. Jesus himself, as a celibate single, modelled a fulfilled and fruitful life, complete and holy in his union with the Father.

4. Marriage

Marriage is used as a metaphor of the love relationship between Christ and His church⁵, of which covenant commitment and intimacy are hallmarks. It is a demonstration of the relationship between God and His people⁶. Because of this, the church ought to do everything it can to encourage, nurture, and protect marriage relationships. Marriage is a sacred union between a man and a woman, reflecting the relationship between Christ and His church.

Marriage is instituted by God and entered into by one man and one woman⁷, through a ceremony recognized by both the church and state, whereby they are united in a covenant, which is:

- **Loving.** Marriage is a relationship rooted in the love of God⁸.

¹ Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18, 23-24.

² Galatians 4:4-8; Romans 8:14-17

³ Romans 5:12

⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:32ff

⁵ Ephesians 5:32

⁶ Isaiah 54:5-8; Ephesians 5:31-32

⁷ See Statement on Human Sexuality

⁸ 1 John 4:7-12

- **Lifelong.** Marriage is a covenant until death⁹.
- **Sacred.** Marriage is sacred in its establishment by God and in its function under God. Marriage was given for human companionship, union, fruitfulness and care of creation¹⁰. It has the capacity to reflect the nature of God to the world¹¹.
- **Intimate.** Marriage involves leaving one's family of origin, being united in a one-flesh union, and establishing a new family unit with the potential of children¹².
- **Exclusive.** No other human relationship must interfere with the marriage commitment. Jesus treated sexual immorality, including lustful thoughts, with utmost seriousness¹³. Marriage is God's intended channel for sexual expression¹⁴.

Therefore, married people are called to be devoted to God and one another out of reverence for Christ¹⁵, to live in mutual respect, submission and self-giving love to one another. The believer is to enter into marriage with another believer¹⁶. The husband and wife are equal before God, since they are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to his people and together husband and wife are called to model Christ, first towards one another, and then towards the world.

5. Parent-Child Relationship

Parents are to reflect God's love to their children and demonstrate His pattern for marriage. Parents are to raise their children to be mature and godly by training them in righteousness and intimacy with God. Parents, supported by the church, are to lead and teach them in these ways through the example of their own lifestyle, through instruction, and through loving discipline¹⁷. Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing from the Lord. Children are to honour and obey their parents¹⁸. As children mature, they are also called to grow in Christlikeness and reflect God in all aspects of their lives.

6. Abuse

Familial abuse is defined as behaviour intended to gain and maintain power and control over another that may span a number of spheres including physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual and/or otherwise in the context of the family. Abuse is recognized as a very serious violation of the marriage covenant. Safety and security of victims is of paramount concern. Separating the abuser and the abused may be immediately necessary for those involved¹⁹.

7. Separation

During any period of separation, no matter its length, marriage vows are still in place and husbands and wives are not free to pursue other intimate relationships.

8. Reconciliation

The forgiveness and reconciliation found in God through Christ can extend into even the most broken of marriages. In any situation one must not be hasty to break the marital ties. Any damaged relationship that has been restored

⁹ Matthew 19:6

¹⁰ Genesis 1:27-28, 2:20-25

¹¹ Ephesians 5

¹² Genesis 2:22-25

¹³ Matthew 5:27-28

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, 8-9; Hebrews 13:4

¹⁵ Ephesians 5:21

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:14

¹⁷ Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4

¹⁸ Ephesians 6:2

¹⁹ Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7; Ephesians 5:25, 29, 33

through godly forgiveness and reconciliation displays the transforming love of Christ. Careful discernment is required on the part of local church leadership to accompany struggling marriages, particularly in cases of abuse.

9. Divorce

The fall of humanity resulted in brokenness on all levels, including marital relationships. Divorce is not part of God's design²⁰. Scripture bears witness to the transforming love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, which heals, restores, and brings things back to life. In circumstances where divorce may be seen as a biblical option, it is never meant to be the first or sole option. Rather, even for those struggling through the pain of a fractured relationship, Christ constantly calls his followers toward wholeness and reconciliation. Any discussion about divorce from a Christian perspective must be viewed through this lens.

- **Sexual Immorality.** Sexual immorality violates the marriage covenant. In such cases, when reconciliation cannot be realized, divorce is permissible^{21 22}.
- **Abandonment.** A spouse who refuses to continue in marriage and leaves the relationship²³, violates the marriage covenant. Divorce is permissible.

Behaviour intended to gain and maintain power and control over another is a potential ground for divorce. Abuse is a violation of a person's inherent dignity and worth as an image-bearer of God, and a violation of the marriage covenant²⁴.

A person who has been divorced, for whatever reason, should seek help and support from the church as they move toward restored health and wholeness in every aspect of their life.

10. Remarriage

The divorced believer, or one who has become a believer following divorce, should always bear in mind that God's desire is to bring restoration to the original marriage relationship. If this is not possible, the divorced person may consider marriage to another person only if this new marriage is on biblical grounds.

Scripture permits remarriage following divorce only if the divorce was on biblical grounds. Persons who remarry after being divorced on other than biblical grounds are guilty before God of adultery²⁵.

The remarriage of persons who have been divorced, is permitted by Scripture only under these circumstances:

- If one of the original spouses dies after a divorce, the remaining partner may remarry²⁶.
- If one spouse's betrayal through sexual immorality results in divorce, the other spouse may remarry²⁷.
- If a spouse chooses to end the marriage, the abandoned spouse may remarry²⁸.
- If a person is divorced on other than Scriptural grounds and previous attempts to reconcile were not reciprocated, or if his or her former partner remarries, the original relationship is dissolved and the remaining partner may remarry²⁹.

²⁰ Malachi 2:10-16; Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11,39; Ephesians 5:21-33

²¹ God's divorce of Israel was because of her spiritual unfaithfulness – intimacy with other gods. Isaiah 57:1-13; Ezekiel 23:1-18; Hosea 2:1-23; Jeremiah 3:20

²² Jesus states this clearly in Matthew 19:9; cf. Matthew 5:32

²³ In this situation, the believing spouse is called to let his or her partner leave, and in this way pursue peace, rather than attempt to force a relationship in which only one party is willing. 1 Corinthians 7: 12-13, 15.

²⁴ Ephesians 5; Colossians 3:19; Exodus 21:26-27

²⁵ Matthew 5:32, 19:1-12; Mark 10:2-12

²⁶ Romans 7:2, 1 Corinthians 7:39

²⁷ Matthew 19:9

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:15

²⁹ Matthew 5:32; 19:9

11. Restoration

Unbiblical divorce and remarriage should be treated with the same grace and hope of redemption as all other sin. For those who confess and turn from wrong, Jesus Christ is faithful and just to forgive, and cleanse from unrighteousness³⁰. In the case of past unbiblical divorce and remarriage, if someone confesses this as sin, taking steps to bring restoration to the relationship in as far as this is possible, they should be forgiven and welcomed in fellowship with the Body of believers.

12. Amendments

This statement may be amended by a majority vote of General Assembly, written notice having been given prior to General Assembly.

Adopted – General Assembly 2022

³⁰ 1 John 1:9