



DAMASCUS ROAD POSITION PAPER ON CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Preface:

Christian leaders always face a parallel issue whenever they offer a Biblical response to any issue being debated in culture:

That parallel and in many ways preeminent issue is the 'spirit' of our response. Does the tone of our response more accurately reflect the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth or the spirit of the Pharisees who crucified Jesus? Pharisaism defended/demanded behavioral purity based on the Law that bore fruit in self-righteous contempt ("The Pharisee stood up and prayed thus about himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not as other men...' [Luke 18:11]). Jesus' attitude was so different. Ironically the Pharisees themselves highlighted this difference by their evaluation of Jesus in Luke 15:1-2, which they meant as scathing criticism, but captured perfectly the true perspective of Jesus' heart—and the heart of all those who drink deeply of Jesus' Spirit:

"Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around Jesus to hear Him [the irreligious felt irresistibly drawn to Jesus]. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law muttered in disgust: "This Man welcomes sinners—and eats with them."

In Jewish culture, sharing a meal (table fellowship) with someone signified your acceptance of her/his personal value and dignity. The scandal in the Gospels is that Jesus regularly extended just such value and dignity to the people who were both religiously and morally outcasts in their day. We must be clear here. These outcasts were often living in violation of Biblical morality.

They understood the condemnation of the Pharisees and why it was given. Nor did Jesus condone or ignore their behavior. But though He challenged them to repent and change, they were still drawn to Him because He treated them with dignity. He saw in each one a person He would [literally] die for. Likewise, the Church of Jesus is called to defend the truth of Jesus as we maintain the genuine Spirit of Jesus:

- "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up..." (Ephesians 4:15).
- "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

In a Christocentric community, truth is not spoken truly unless it is spoken in love: from a heart filled with 'agape' (a self-sacrificing concern for another person's best good). This distinctly Christian tone to all our interactions is birthed when we personally grasp that our only hope is unearned grace and that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Position on Christian Marriage

Historically and culturally, marriage has been the fundamental building block for civilization and has been seen as such in every culture. Throughout human history, marriage has always been the union between a man and a woman for mutual support; and to build a family where mother and father (male and female) unite to create and raise children. This union of a man and a woman in marriage is an essential building block guarding the future of human civilization as we have known it throughout all history.

The common wisdom of every culture has also affirmed that even the best mother cannot replace a father and even the best father cannot replace a mother—and children ideally need both mother and father. In any culture where marriage and the family unit crumble, the children suffer the most, and most quickly.

Marriage in the Judeo-Christian heritage is a distinctly covenantal relationship, resting on the belief that God created humanity both male and female, then God Himself instituted the covenant of marriage (Genesis 2:22-25) as a sacred, binding, life-long commitment to exclusive sexual and emotional intimacy, vulnerable honesty and deep unity between a man and a woman:

"Haven't you read," Jesus replied, "that in 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'? They are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together let no one separate." Matthew 19:4-6 [italics supplied]

From Jesus' reflection in Matthew 19 on the description of marriage Genesis 2 it is clear that God's definition of marriage is a male/female union ("a man...his wife..."). Defining marriage as the deepest human symbol of Christ's love for His church, the apostle Paul ends with these words: *"Therefore, every man also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."* Again, this and every mention of marriage in the Bible makes it explicitly clear that Christian marriage is the union of two people, a man and a woman, in a lifelong covenant of mutual support and ministry. This in turn creates a family unit that ideally includes a father and mother, together serving as the foundation of the family—the covering for children:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right: 'Honor your father and your mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Ephesians 6:1-3

At Damascus Road Community Church we affirm and protect the sanctity of marriage as the God-ordained, covenantal relationship between one man and one woman for life. This covenant includes the commitment to love, comfort and honor one another in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, be faithful to one another. We affirm this life-long covenantal relationship as the basis for the family-unit.

We also affirm the Biblical call for all people to live out the sexual ethics taught in Scripture. The Bible affirms and blesses the goodness of sexual expression between a man and a woman in the context of marriage; and calls for sexual abstinence and purity for everyone else.¹

¹ Therefore, as Christian leaders we cannot use the authority of the church or the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to endorse any redefinition of marriage outside the Bible's clear and positive teaching. But new and non-Biblical re-definitions of marriage according to cultural norms are not the only or even most pressing threat. Equally pressing threats to the Church's message on marriage include the hard-hearted forsaking by some married Christians of their commitment to life-long fidelity and mutual support, and more generally, the loss of sexual integrity among many within the Christian community. The twin plagues of pornography and divorce have marred the health of the church and blunted her witness to a watching world. Because of this, we commit and re-dedicate ourselves to helping the Spirit of Christ building strong and joyful marriages in our church.