

Definition of Biblical Marriage

EFCC Resource Guide on Marriage and Sexuality

Moral precepts and instruction are universally recognized as an intrinsic part of religious teaching and practice. The Evangelical Free Church of Canada affirms the historic, theological and Biblical understanding of marriage and sexuality. These theological precepts and moral directions are derived from the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Trinitarian theology in which we find meaning and community.

Biblical passages that ground our historic theological understanding of marriage, sexuality and related conduct:

On the purpose and origin of marriage:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’” Genesis 1:27-28a

“The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’, for she was taken out of man.’” For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”
Genesis 2: 23-25

In the Genesis story, Adam and Eve are formed together as God’s “image bearers”, a unique role within the created order. The Bible indicates that God’s image is not adequately reflected by only one sex: both together are necessary for a full reflection of the divine character. Furthermore, it is clear from the Genesis account that man and woman are intended to be united as husband and wife, “one flesh”, and to create and nurture children. In Christian theology, the marriage union between a man and woman also reflects the plurality and unity within the Trinity.

Marriage in historic Christian faith is a symbolic expression of God’s nature, where two complementary but different image bearers (man and woman), become one, exploring and revealing the mystery of God’s own Trinitarian plurality and unity as they mature together.

On the permanence of marriage:

In the Gospels, Jesus said: *“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “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. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”* Matthew 19:4-6

The description of marriage as a sacred union of a man and a woman, taught in the first chapters of Genesis, is affirmed by Jesus as a life-long commitment.

Marriage in the Holy Scriptures involves significant theological & moral principles:

The New Testament uses Marriage as an essential metaphor for understanding the relationship between Christ and the Church. For example, the Apostle John describes the relationship of Christ to his church to that of a groom to a bride (Revelation 19:7).

In the Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul uses Christ’s love for the Church as a model for Christian marriage:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church---for we are

members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Ephesians 6:25-33

On the sacredness of sex for Christians and its place in marriage:

"The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body...Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. I Corinthians 6:18-20.

"But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer." I Corinthians 7:2-5a

Sexuality is a healthy and natural part of human experience, but its rightful expression, according to the Bible, is between a man and a woman, who have entered into a marriage covenant before God. In our faith tradition, sexual expression outside of this model of marriage is viewed as contrary to God's will and a violation of the community of believers.

Summary: According to These and Other Sacred Scriptures, We Affirm That:

- In Christian teaching, marriage is a divinely sanctioned institution carrying significant theological implications, and which is foundational to God's plan for humanity and to the life of the Church.
- In the Holy Scriptures, God clearly intends marriage to occur between a man and a woman, and sexual relations are to be reserved for marriage.
- The Bible indicates that marriage is intended to be life-long union, and divorce is permitted only as a last resort, and for limited reasons.
- Monogamy is the New Testament norm, and polygamy is specifically condemned (I Timothy 3:2).
- According to both the Old and New Testaments, sexuality and fidelity are critical aspects of healthy bonding ("oneness") in marriage. Infidelity is therefore a serious breach of trust, spiritually, relationally and in the community of faith.
- Teachings about marriage and sexuality in the Bible are important aspects of our spirituality and religious faith. Far from being arbitrary lists of prohibitions, Biblical precepts and moral directions about sexual conduct and marriage are interconnected to foundational theological doctrines for our community.