

# Baptist Churches of SA and Marriage

We recognise that sexuality is God's gift to all persons. All people, regardless of their sexual practice or sense of sexual orientation, are individuals of great worth to God. We affirm God's grace is available to all. The ministry, guidance, love and acceptance of a community of Christian people should be available to all people in their struggles for human fulfilment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of that community that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others and the self.

The story of God in the Bible paints a picture of flourishing life for humanity. It imagines and describes an ideal for human relationships and community, especially as these are lived out within Christian community. This includes marriage as the expression of sexual intimacy and the foundation of families.

The recent changes to the Australian legal definition of marriage in 2017 has magnified the differing perspectives on the definition of marriage. The Baptist Churches of South Australia affirms marriage as the union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life. This position is based on our view that the Bible is instructive for the flourishing of human life and authoritative for the community of faith.

However, this position should not define the posture and tone, or love in action, of the church towards the wider community. We are called to a posture of generous listening and hospitable love towards those who disagree with us. In this we can do better.

We support the rights of all couples to justice with respect to property and like entitlements and we acknowledge that people, including some in our own churches, experience a diversity of challenges with respect to sexuality.

Our biblical understanding of marriage is informed by the creation narrative, which speaks of marriage as partnership and stewardship, usually including procreation. Jesus affirms this view of marriage (Matt 19:4-6). The early church letters unpack the functioning of healthy relationships lived out in the context of church community, including marriage and singleness. These letters affirm an understanding that marriage is between a man and a woman.

The biblical imagination describes marriage that is between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31); voluntarily covenanted for life (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Malachi 2:14); a witness to equality (1 Corinthians 7:4); and lived out with fidelity (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

In every place the Bible talks about marriage it is between a man and a woman. For example, the author of Hebrews (Heb 13:4-7), even when it is unstated, assumes a context of heterosexual marriage in the discussion on marriage purity. Similarly, the Song of Solomon, a classic text of sexual intimacy, does not leave any room for reinterpreting married love in a same-sex capacity. Where the Bible uses the image of marriage as a metaphor it is always used in the context of a husband and a wife (e.g. Eph 5:21-33; Isa 54:5-8).

It is worth noting that the story of God in the Bible also describes behaviours that are disobedient and damaging to the biblical imagination of human flourishing, including in heterosexual relationships. When same-sex relationships are mentioned in the Bible it is in the context of being unacceptable or unhelpful for human flourishing (e.g. Lev 20:13; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-10). The story of God's people in the Bible includes examples of relational practices that are different to the context of heterosexual marriage, including polygamy, prostitution and same sex activity. These behaviours are not described as part of the biblical imagination's ideal for human flourishing, but as descriptions of cultural behaviour, and are not intended to be normative for human activity.

We recognise that this biblical imagination for human flourishing contrasts with our contemporary culture's imagination for the good life; marriage is not the only context where this is true. We acknowledge there are significant social reasons this conviction about marriage is also shared by other peoples and cultures not of Christian faith.

Our challenge is to live this out with compassion and love. To that end we commit to being inclusive and welcoming to people who hold differing views; better at listening well; better at being family to all in our communities; generously hospitable to those we disagree with; and gracious in tone and compassionate in action.