

# REMAINING FAITHFUL

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## Marriage & Methodism



### A STUDY GUIDE

for individuals and groups



The Methodist Church's position on marriage is currently summarised in Standing Order 011A(1);

*The Methodist Church believes that marriage is a gift of God and that it is God's intention that a marriage should be a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman.*

As the Methodist Worship Book marriage service also indicates, this gift will sometimes be accompanied by the bearing of children. God's call to be fruitful and multiply is fulfilled within the marriage relationship.

In today's context, this understanding of marriage is contested. Within wider society, some call the Church to keep in step with social trends and bless same-sex marriage, legal in Great Britain since 2014. Some within the Church also call for a change in its teaching, although the Methodist Conference in 1993 reaffirmed the traditional teaching of the Church, 'namely chastity for all outside marriage and fidelity within it', calling for a pilgrimage of faith that would 'give dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality.'<sup>1</sup> While all Methodists would agree on the importance of recognising every person's value, some argue that such a pilgrimage should lead to the acceptance of same-sex marriage.

In the light of such discussions, it is important for Methodists to return again to the Scriptures and seek wisdom from them

## INTRODUCTION

as to the meaning of marriage. The Bible should guide us in our moral reflection, even if tradition, experience and reason can help us discern more clearly how the Scriptures can speak to us today.

In this document, we seek to show that the current Methodist view on marriage – a union of one man and one woman – is **faithful to the Bible**. It is in light of the high biblical view of marriage that the Bible prohibits other forms of sexual behaviour that some now seek to bless. At the same time, the Bible shows that marriage is not the only calling for those who seek to follow Christ. Singleness too is praised and valued as a means to glorify God.

This view of marriage is **faithful to the history of the Church**. While there have been diverse approaches to marriage among Christians across the ages, there has also been a consistent view that marriage is a union between one man and woman. It is within such a union that sexual expression and the bearing and raising of children takes place. Such a view of marriage is also found in the vast majority of cultures. Moreover, faithfulness to Scripture and the tradition of the church does not mean that we simply ignore arguments from reason and experience. There is, for instance, a vast body of evidence strongly suggesting that children's interests are generally best served by their being brought up by married parents.<sup>2</sup>

The current Methodist view of marriage is **faithful to Christian theology**. Marriage is

a gift of God, a means God has ordained for uniting man and woman and raising children. God blesses this form of marriage, and so we should be wary of attempts to change it into something else. While marriage is the God-given context for sexual relationships, God also blesses and calls other people to the single life as an equally honoured way to serve him.

As well as unpacking biblical, historical and theological reasons for remaining faithful to the current Methodist view of marriage, this booklet can be used as a discussion guide for small groups and churches. Each chapter ends with questions to prompt conversation, and a list for further reading is found at the back of the booklet. An appendix offers answers to some frequently asked questions about the current Methodist view of marriage.



## QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think marriage has become such a common topic of discussion within the Methodist Church?
2. Do you think the Bible presents a clear teaching about marriage? Why or why not?
3. How might clear teaching on marriage shape the way we form disciples?



**MARRIAGE  
IN THE BIBLE**

For Methodists, the Bible is the primary authority for our beliefs and for our lives. As Clause 4 of the Methodist Deed of Union puts it,

*The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice.*

We need to discern with the greatest care what the Bible says about marriage and how that might shape our current thinking. This is particularly important as we enter debates on whether the Church needs to change its understanding of marriage. As John Wesley once put it, 'the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not the Scripture by the Church.'<sup>3</sup>

The Bible is **relevant** to our thinking of marriage. Some argue that the Bible cannot really speak authoritatively, pointing perhaps to the patriarchal setting of the Bible. Instead of consulting the Bible, they suggest that the church should look to contemporary experience to help us think about marriage. Such a view undermines and contradicts the Church's commitment to the authority of the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and practice.

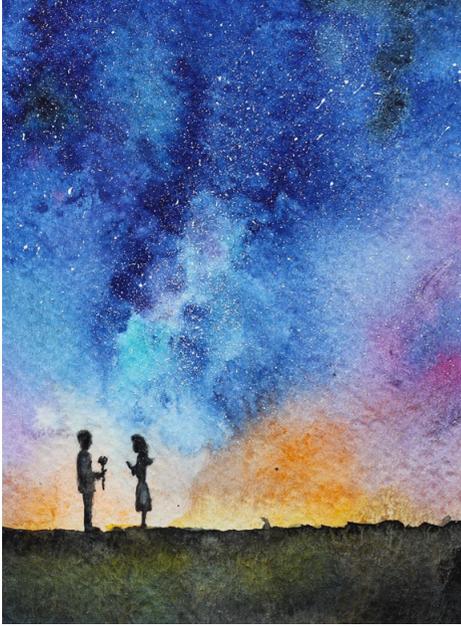
The Bible is also **clear** in its teaching on marriage. Some would argue against this view, perhaps pointing out that the Bible records instances of polygamy among its greatest figures, such as David

and Solomon (1 Kings 11:3). Such views confuse the descriptive passages of the Bible with *prescriptive* texts. Although the Bible records polygamy among the Patriarchs and Israel's kings, it seeks to regulate the practice, partly to safeguard the vulnerable within a disobedient society (Exodus 21:7-11). Scripture as a whole depicts monogamy and singleness as God's ideal.<sup>4</sup>

The Bible is also **consistent** in its teaching, especially when we focus on the whole of the Bible alongside an analysis of specific passages. While it includes customs and traditions around marriage reflecting cultures and eras different from our own - and while the structure of family differed from contemporary models - the Bible teaches an understanding of marriage as a permanent and exclusive union between a man and a woman which also provides the context for bearing and raising children.

## CREATION

The roots of the marriage relationship lie in the creation of man and woman. Both male and female are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), and yet are depicted as distinct and interdependent, reflecting the complementarity within the whole of creation.<sup>5</sup> God creates men and women in a relationship of equality and mutuality, and both 'play indispensable and honourable, related and complementary, roles in the economy



of life.<sup>6</sup> The binary distinction between male and female is incorporated into the design of creation, and reflected in the distinctions between heaven and earth, sea and sky, day and night.

Genesis 1 also shows that man and woman share the divine commission to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1:28), pointing to the importance of bearing children. Together they are given dominion over creation, set as stewards over what God has made (Genesis 1:28). The relationship of men and women - and the gift of marriage - is given in the context of God's call to service.<sup>7</sup>

In Genesis 2, the interdependence of man and woman is again reflected in the creation of Eve, formed as a partner for Adam. Since it is not good for man to be alone, woman is taken from the rib of man. Adam recognises Eve as 'bone of

my bones, and flesh of my flesh' (Genesis 2:21). Together, they are to serve God within creation.

It is within this context that the Bible first introduces marriage. Since men and women are created to be partners, a man will leave his parents and 'cling' to his wife so that they might become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). This one-flesh unity between man and woman is clearly physical, but also emotional, spiritual and relational.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find that Jesus affirms the teaching of Genesis on marriage. When asked his view on divorce, Jesus directs his hearers to God the Father's original plan for marriage (Mark 10:1-12; Matthew 19:3-12). God created humanity as 'male and female', and marriage unites man and woman as 'one flesh' (Mark 10:8). The one-flesh union is between the two distinct genders created by God.<sup>8</sup>

Paul also speaks of the mutual interdependence of man and woman, since 'in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman' (1 Corinthians 11:11). In marriage, the complementarity of man and woman is reflected in their sexual relationship (1 Corinthians 7:3-4).

## PERMANENCE

Jesus' teaching on marriage also affirms its permanence (Mark 10:1-12; Matthew

19:3-12). Within the context of debates around divorce, Jesus teaches that God's original plan was that the one-flesh union would be life-long.<sup>9</sup>

Paul also affirms the importance of permanence in marriage. Even converts who have non-Christian spouses should seek to preserve the marital bond, and God can work through them in bringing their husband or wife to salvation (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

The Methodist Church acknowledges that there may be circumstances where divorce is permitted, and so allows for the marriage of those who are divorced. The Church retains the ideal of marriage as a life-long union, and ministers may share in a prayer of penitence with the divorced seeking a new marriage.<sup>10</sup>

## CHASTITY AND FAITHFULNESS

Marriage in the Bible is celebrated for the gifts that it brings. Sexual union is a good gift of God, with the Song of Songs especially celebrating the physical union between husband and wife. Marriage is also the context for giving birth and raising children, as the Psalms particularly emphasise (Psalm 127 - 128).

While sexuality is a good gift, the Bible confines sexual intimacy to the marriage relationship. Within the law code, a range of relationships outside of the marital

bond are prohibited (Leviticus 18:1-30), and the wisdom literature warns of the dangers of adultery and prostitution (Proverbs 6:23-29; 23:27).

The New Testament is also clear that sexual relationships outside marriage are not permitted. Jesus gives a stark warning against lust (Matthew 5:27-30) and Paul warns against 'sexual immorality', a catch-all term that includes sexual relations outside the marital bond (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20). Precisely because sex unites man and woman so completely, those who sin sexually harm themselves - and dishonour Jesus and the Spirit who dwells within them (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

## CELIBACY

Jesus also explained that the kingdom of God created a new kind of family (Mark 3:35). The family constituted around Jesus is more significant than the biological family, and so discipleship will sometimes involve fracturing the existing family. And yet while for some discipleship brings a 'sword' to family relationships (Matthew 10:34-39), Jesus' teaching on marriage also affirms it as a gift of God.

Unlike many Jews at the time, Jesus spoke of the single life as a way to follow God. While some are called to marriage, others are called to singleness (Matthew 19:12). God sanctifies singleness as well as marriage.

Paul also speaks of singleness as a calling in the Christian life (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). Those who are single have unique opportunities to serve God, and so Paul affirms the single state - like the married state - as a gift (1 Corinthians 7:7).

## COVENANT

The significance of marriage is seen in the way it reflects God's covenant relationship with his people (Isaiah 54:5-17; Ezekiel 16:6-14). Just as man and wife bind themselves to one another, so God commits himself to His people through the covenant.<sup>11</sup> This is powerfully illustrated in the book of Hosea, in which God's relationship with Israel is illustrated through the prophet's marriage to his unfaithful wife. Despite Israel's current infidelity, the prophet sees a future where God declares to His people, 'I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy' (Hosea 2:19, ESV).

In one of the most profound images within Scripture, Paul sees marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:21-33). Just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, so Paul calls husbands to love their wives sacrificially (Ephesians 5:25-28). The one-flesh union of man and woman in marriage, Paul argues, is a 'great mystery', but one that applies to Christ and the Church. In a deeply mysterious way, the union of a man and a woman in

their gendered difference can represent the union of God and humanity.

In the final book of the Bible, marriage is again used as a symbol of the relationship between God and humanity. Revelation 21 depicts the 'marriage supper of the lamb' (Revelation 19:9), the time in which the new Jerusalem - filled with saints old and new - descends from heaven 'as a bride adorned for her husband' (Revelation 21:2). Just as an earthly wedding unites man and woman in a time of celebration, so the future hope is that heaven and earth will again unite and so show forth the glory and wonder of God. As NT Wright notes, 'Marriage is a sign of all things in heaven and on earth coming together in Christ.'<sup>12</sup>



## QUESTIONS

1. Why is the mutual interdependence of male and female such an important feature of the biblical depiction of marriage?
2. What are the challenges we face today in proclaiming the biblical view of marriage?
3. How can we create a culture within the Church that supports those seeking to remain faithful to the biblical view of marriage?



MARRIAGE AND  
THE HISTORY OF  
THE CHURCH

Marriage has changed and evolved in many ways through history. Different cultures have chosen different ceremonies and customs to mark the entry into marriage, and the role of the state and the Church in regulating marriage has developed throughout the centuries. The way that theologians have spoken about marriage has also varied, with one historian noting four different models for marriage throughout the Church's history.<sup>13</sup>

## UNITIVE

Despite such diversity, there has also been a consistent core of teaching on marriage throughout the church's history – a core that reflects the teaching of Scripture.<sup>14</sup> As the heart of this teaching is a belief that marriage unites a man and a woman 'in one flesh'. This is often known as the 'unitive' meaning of marriage, and assumes the significance of gendered difference within marriage.<sup>15</sup> Marriage, the Church has consistently affirmed, is between one man and one woman.

## PERMANENT

Since the one-flesh union is so significant, Christians have unanimously held that marriage should be permanent. Following the teaching of the New Testament, churches have sought to uphold marriage as a life-long union. When divorce does occur, the Methodist Church supports those who have experienced it while

also allowing for remarriage. But the Church continues to affirm God's ideal of permanence for marriage.

## PROCREATIVE

As well as uniting man and woman together, the Christian tradition has also always seen marriage as the context for bearing and raising children. The 'procreative' aspect of marriage means that man and woman together form the marital bond, as it is only as man and woman come together that the children are conceived.<sup>16</sup> But marriage is also a call to nurture children, helping them to grow in the way of the Lord.<sup>17</sup> While not every marriage will include children, biblical marriage should be open to the blessing that they bring.<sup>18</sup>

## CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The Christian tradition has spoken of the way in which marriage reflects the union between Christ and the Church, so echoing the teaching of Ephesians. While Christians have expressed this in different ways, such an understanding recognises that marriage has a spiritual significance that transcends its unitive and procreative purposes. Marriage is intended to reflect God's faithfulness and love.<sup>19</sup>

## A CREATION ORDINANCE

Significantly, the 'unitive' and 'procreative' purposes of marriage have also been broadly accepted throughout human history. Since children only emerge from the union of man and woman, societies have had an interest in recognising and regulating these unions as 'marriages.'<sup>20</sup> Sociological studies have also shown that children do best when raised by married fathers and mothers.<sup>21</sup>

Marriage, then, is a 'creation ordinance' – given for the blessing of all – rather than a creation of the State. It is incumbent on the Church to honour marriage, even if

the State departs from the biblical vision of marriage or institutes new forms of it.



### QUESTIONS

1. What do you make of the 'unitive' and 'procreative' purposes of marriage?
2. In what ways can marriage show us something about God?
3. What are the dangers of departing from the concept of marriage held by Christians throughout the Church's history?





A THEOLOGY  
OF MARRIAGE

Based on the Bible and the historic teaching of the Church, we can identify key themes in a theology of marriage - each of which show that the current teaching on marriage within the Church ought to be preserved.

## **MARRIAGE IS A GIFT OF GOD**

Within the creation narrative of Genesis, God consistently declares his creation 'good' and 'very good', with the first reference to that which is 'not good' is for man 'to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). It is in response to this that the woman is brought into being, and the text witnesses to the gift that male and females bring to one another in the marriage relationship. This includes the profound union that men and women experience in the marriage relationship, including in the sexual relationship (Genesis 2:22-25).

## **MARRIAGE IS A UNION BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN**

Marriage is a union between a man and a woman, and so brings together the corresponding gifts and graces of man and woman together. Such a partnership between a man and a woman is a unique and necessary part of the marriage bond. Suggesting that marriage could be extended to same-sex couples ignores the corresponding gifts and graces of male and female that marriage requires.

## **MARRIAGE IS ABOUT FAITHFULNESS**

Marriage is about the faithfulness of husband and wife to one another, and so Christians are called to commit to marriage for life. This does not mean that there are no circumstances in which divorce can take place, but that the church should continue to proclaim God's call to permanent marriage. Families who are affected by divorce do, of course, deserve and need the support and care of the Church community. But even when divorced Christians seek remarriage, the Church calls them to lifelong fidelity within the marriage bond.

## **MARRIAGE IS ABOUT FRUITFULNESS**

Marriage is about fruitfulness, which includes the fruitfulness of man and woman in giving birth to children and raising them. It is only man and woman together who can conceive a child, and so marriage is 'procreative' in a way that is unique and God-given.<sup>22</sup> While not all couples are able to have children, many such couples choose to adopt or foster children, and all couples - regardless of whether or not they have children - can be fruitful in partnering together to serve God within the world.<sup>23</sup>

## MARRIAGE IS THE CONTEXT FOR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

While our culture depicts a sexual relationship as either the ultimate means of fulfilment or simply as the satisfaction of a physical need, neither is true. Sexuality is a means of strengthening the marital bond, and is to be celebrated within the context of a marriage relationship.

## MARRIAGE CAN REFLECT SOMETHING OF GOD

Marriage can and does reflect something of God. As Paul shows in Ephesians 5:31-32, the mystery of marriage can be applied to Christ and the Church, or as one Methodist Statement on marriage puts it, marriage can be 'seen as a reflection of the life of eternity, in which we may experience the presence of God in a daily dying and rising to self and to the partner'.<sup>24</sup>

## MARRIAGE ALONGSIDE SINGLENES ARE TWO CALLINGS WITHIN CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Christian view of sexual relationships has always held that there are two states in life: a married life and a single life. While in some contexts the single life has been seen as superior, others within the Church today seem to suggest that marriage is God's 'best' and a gift for all. As Jesus and Paul show, celibate singleness can be an honourable way to serve God too.



### QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to understand the 'theology' expressed in marriage?
2. How can we challenge and critique common but unhelpful assumptions about sexuality in our culture today?
3. How can churches do a better job at honouring singles as well as those who are married within their midst?



## CONCLUSION

In the light of continuing debates over revising our understanding of marriage, it is important to remain faithful to the current teaching regarding marriage within the Methodist Church. Viewing marriage as a union between a man and a woman reflects biblical teaching as well as the practice of marriage within cultures throughout history. It also reflects God's ordering of human life, an ordering that is given to us so that we might flourish and grow in fellowship with God.

Such a concept of marriage remains good news, both within and outside of the Church. While we continue to proclaim it, we are also committed to welcoming those who struggle to live up to it. This requires wise pastoral care alongside clear teaching and discipleship.



## FOR FURTHER READING

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Ash, Christopher, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*. Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003.

Gagnon, Robert A. J. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.

Girgis, Sherif, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert B. George, *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*. New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2012.

Goddard, Andrew and Don Horrocks, *Biblical and Pastoral Responsibilities to Homosexuality*. Evangelical Alliance, 2012.

Grant, Jonathan. *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015.

Grenz, Stanley, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990.

Harrison, Glynn. *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Relationships*. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016.

Heistand, Gerald L. and Todd Wilson. *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality*. Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Hollinger, Dennis S. *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.

Jones, Beth Felker. *Faithful: A Theology of Sex*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015.

Lopes, Steven and Helen Alvaré, ed. *Not Just Good, but Beautiful: The Complementary Relationship between Man and Woman*. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2015.

Noble, Thomas A., Sarah K. Whittle, and Philip S. Johnston, ed.. *Marriage, Family and Relationships: Biblical, doctrinal and contemporary perspectives*. London: Apollos, 2017.

Wilson, Todd. *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Isn't it 'fundamentalist' to suggest that the Bible can tell us anything about marriage?**

The use of the Bible in discussions of what it means to be human and the nature of marriage is common within theology. It is not fundamentalist to listen to what God is saying to us through Scripture but instead the proper task of theology. As one theologian puts it, 'Living in accordance with the Scriptures—being biblical—is... the disciple's prime directive. To be a follower of Christ is to be a follower of Scripture'.<sup>25</sup>

### **If Jesus didn't rule out making new forms of marriage, why should we?**

Jesus had no need to rule out making new forms of marriage, as there is no evidence to suggest that anyone was proposing it. He cannot therefore have been expected to address the issue. Jesus did, however, clearly assume that marriage involved the 'one bond' of male and female together, and roots his teaching in the creation narrative. This implicitly rules out same-sex marriages, just as it rules out polygamous relationships.

### **Why should we exclude same-sex marriage when there are only a few verses that address homosexual practice?**

As we have argued, the Bible's teaching on marriage implicitly defines it as involving a union between one man and one woman. It is in light of this positive teaching about marriage that other forms of sexual relationship are described as falling outside of God's will. It is the big picture of marriage and sexuality that is important as well as specific verses.

### **How should we deal pastorally with those who struggle to live up to the Bible's calling of sexuality?**

While calling people to live in the grace that God provides, our approach should always be shaped by compassion and grace. We should aim to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) while also carrying one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). There are a range of resources to help us in this area.<sup>26</sup>

### **What about cohabitation?**

The practice of cohabitation is rising in today's society, and some call for the Church to accept it. Despite its prevalence, Christians are called primarily to be faithful to the teaching of Scripture, and it is clear that Scripture excludes sexual relationships outside of the marital bond. For that reason, churches need to teach clearly the need for sexual purity among single people and promote a culture that encourages marriages to thrive.<sup>27</sup>

## **Isn't it unjust to deny same-sex couples the right to marry?**

Injustice is depriving people of a right to which they are entitled, but it is wrong to assume that same-sex marriage is a 'right' that the Church needs to grant. In light of the historical understanding of marriage as a union of man and woman, the call to bless same-sex unions as marriage is a radical innovation and a departure from Christian teaching on marriage. Same-sex unions do not unite man and woman together in 'one flesh', they are not procreative, and they do not reflect the union between Christ and his Church that Paul finds in the relation between husband and wife.

## **Shouldn't we allow different views of marriage to flourish within the Church, and so allow the blessing of same-sex marriage for those who support it?**

While some suggest that Christians can agree to disagree on this issue, the Bible speaks clearly about issues of sexual morality and should guide us in our thinking about marriage today. Given the Bible's teaching on this topic, it would be wrong for the wider Church to accept as legitimate opposing views on the morality of same-sex marriage. In fact, to do so would deny the teaching of the Bible on the issue. It would also make discipleship in the area of sexual ethics difficult as well as damaging our relations with other churches throughout the world.

## **Isn't ruling out same-sex marriage homophobic?**

The Methodist Church has rightly insisted that homophobic attitudes and actions are inconsistent with Christian faith. Christians are called to love their neighbours without regard for their sexual orientation. Remaining faithful to the current Methodist view of marriage, however, is by no means homophobic, as the current Methodist guidance on homophobia recognises.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, many secular gay activists have argued against same-sex marriage, albeit on different grounds.

## **Won't holding the traditional view of marriage damage our mission to society?**

While it is true that the biblical view of marriage is increasingly becoming a minority view, this is no reason to reject it. We are called to be faithful rather than popular, and God's message to the world often appears foolish (1 Cor 1:1-25). While retaining the biblical view of marriage may lead to hostility, it is a view held by the majority of Christians in the world as well as throughout history. Most importantly of all, it is a view that is consistent with the Bible.

<sup>1</sup> For list of the resolutions on human sexuality from the Derby Conference in 1993, visit [www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/views-of-the-church/human-sexuality-including-gay-and-lesbian-issues](http://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/views-of-the-church/human-sexuality-including-gay-and-lesbian-issues)

<sup>2</sup> Sherif Gergis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George. *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defence* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2012), pp. 38-46.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings, vol 1: God and Providence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Location 1530.

<sup>4</sup> For a helpful discussion of polygamy in the Old Testament, see David T. Lamb, *Prostitutes and Polygamists: A Look at Love, Old Testament Style* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), pp. 59-86; and Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), pp. 110-123

<sup>5</sup> Wright, N. T. 'From Genesis to Revelation: An Anglican Perspective' in *'Not Just Good, but Beautiful: The Complementary Relationship between Man and Woman*, ed. Steven Lopes Walden and Helen Alavré (New York: Plough Publishing House, 2015), pp. 83-93. Note that the 'complementarity' of man and woman does not imply 'complementarianism', the view that the male as a 'headship' role within the home and/or the church.

<sup>6</sup> John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, vol 3: Israel's Life* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 356.

<sup>7</sup> This is a key theme with Christopher Ash *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Leciester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), esp. 112-132.

<sup>8</sup> For the logic of this, see Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), kindle location 4166.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew includes an 'exception clause' (Matt 19:9), indicating that 'unchastity' is grounds for divorce, and Christians have also discerned other grounds for divorce within Scripture too. The emphasis, however, is clearly on God's will for marriage to be permanent, even if divorce may sometimes occur.

<sup>10</sup> See *CPD 2*, p. 800.

<sup>11</sup> For this reason, adultery can be a potent symbol of the unfaithfulness and idolatry and Israel (Ezekiel 23:1-4). The prophet Malachi also speaks of marriage as a covenant, with God as the witness between husband and wife (Malachi 2:13-16).

<sup>12</sup> Wright, 'From Genesis to Revelation,' p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> See John Witte Jr. *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion and Law in the Western Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> For this 'core' teaching, see especially Todd A. Wilson, *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017) and Oliver O'Donovan, "One man and one woman": The Christian doctrine of marriage,' Thomas A. Noble and Sarah K. Whittle, and Philip S. Johnston, ed. *Marriage, Family and Relationships: Biblical, doctrinal and contemporary perspectives* (London: Apollos, 2017), pp. 190-202.

<sup>15</sup> As Wilson notes, 'sexual difference, being male or female, is both theologically and morally significant. It matters to God, and it ought to matter to us,' *Mere Sexuality*, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, in recent times, ways have been found to avoid the necessity of sexual union in producing children, but both male and female genetic material remains indispensable no matter how a child is conceived.

<sup>17</sup> This is a point stressed by Ash, *Marriage*, pp. 162-170.

<sup>18</sup> For a careful discussion of the point with some helpful pastoral pointers, see Ash, *Marriage*, 175-181.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Grant. *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), pp. 49-50.

<sup>20</sup> See Gergis, Anderson and George, *What is Marriage?*

<sup>21</sup> Gergis, Anderson and George, *What is Marriage?*, pp. 38-46.

<sup>22</sup> As pointed out in footnote 15, there are ways today to produce children without sexual union but male and female genetic material is always required.

<sup>23</sup> This is a key emphasis of Ash, *Marriage*, esp. pp. 112-132.

<sup>24</sup> 'A Christian Understanding of Family Life, the Single Life and Marriage'

<sup>25</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), Kindle location 252.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Glynn Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Relationships* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), and - for a more detailed discussion - Grant, *Divine Sex*.

<sup>27</sup> For helpful ways of teaching on purity (with a critique of aspects of 'purity culture'), see Beth Felker Jones *Faithful: A Theology of Sex* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), pp. 82-93.

<sup>28</sup> See the document, 'Homophobia: Definition and Guidance' produced by Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee of The Methodist Church in 2015; [www.methodist.org.uk/media/2089/7-1-1-sexual-orientation-homophobia-guidance.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2089/7-1-1-sexual-orientation-homophobia-guidance.pdf)

Methodist Evangelicals Together is the largest independent organization in British Methodism today. We are a renewal movement which is Bible-based and prayer-focussed, uniting and representing evangelicals at every level within our denomination.

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