

# Marriage and the Public Good

## A Biblical View

### Executive Summary

Marriage is the heart of an integrated society. As it weakens, society fragments. Government protection of marriage is best for everyone, including the unmarried.

**Marriage integrates humanity.** Humanity is male and female – and by making the two into ‘one flesh’, marriage naturally integrates all the following aspects of human life with one another: sexuality, children, education, productivity, welfare, families, generations, communities and wider public life. Hence we see:

**Marriage itself is an integrated whole.** Just as human life has many aspects joined together by marriage, so marriage itself has many aspects which should not be divided. Marriage is the central piece of the jigsaw of creation. It not only holds together the other pieces, but it carries a pattern of its own which completes the picture. So marriage is the voluntary sexual and public social union of one man and one woman from different families. It is a union patterned upon the union of God with his people, his bride: Christ with his church. Intrinsic to this union is God’s calling to lifelong exclusive sexual faithfulness. It exists for fruitfulness both for the parties and for society at large. Hence we see:

**Marriage cannot be changed – it is part of reality.** It is instituted objectively in this way by God for a reason. It cannot ultimately be reduced to constituent elements which can be rearranged or some of them discarded. Nor does it take its reality as an institution by the exercise of privatised choice or commitment. These individualistic approaches tend toward fragmentation and damage both individuals and society. Marriage ultimately has its unchangeable design because:

**Marriage is integrated with the gospel.** As we live in a fallen world, marriages are imperfect and difficult. They can be childless and sometimes end in divorce. We look forward to the greater and perfect Marriage between Christ and his people – to which marriages are designed to point. In the meantime the job of government is to order society corporately on the norm of marriage, for everyone’s benefit, and not to mistake the imperfections of our own relationships as imperfections of marriage itself. Within this public order, churches, as the family of God, should bring extra love to those who do not or cannot experience the blessing of marriage themselves.

## Outline

### Part I: What is Marriage?

1. The nature of marriage
2. The definition of marriage

### Part II: Why is Marriage Good?

1. Integrated sexuality
2. Integrated children
3. Integrated productivity and welfare
4. Integrated families and communities
5. Integrated public life

### Conclusion: Marriage and beyond

### Appendix: LCF Framework – *Good News for the Public Square*

## About This Resource

LCF Public Good Papers exist to help Christians engage lovingly and biblically in the public square. They constitute the second tier in a **three tier cascade** of resources for our members.

Our **first tier** resource is our overarching ‘Framework’ for how good government relates to the spread of the gospel – what it means in general to ‘promote the good news of Jesus Christ by working for godly laws’, as part of the LCF mission statement sets out. The Framework is drawn from our London seminar series, given by leading thinkers, including Rev Dr Mike Ovey, Dr Jonathan Chaplin, Dr David McIlroy and Dr Wayne Grudem (see Appendix for a summary). Christians should love their neighbours not only by spreading the gospel message, but also by practical action, which includes working for good laws for our neighbours and their children – for everyone in society. In practice this means using patient persuasive argument to promote effective policies that are good for everyone (whether they are Christian or not) on the basis of how God has designed humanity to flourish. The Framework addresses when and how Christians should engage with our legislators and on what issues we should engage with them.

**Second tier** ‘Public Good Papers’ – such as this one – then examine this ‘public good’ in more detail under generic perspective headings, such as life, marriage, freedom from slavery, access to justice and freedom of religion. The purpose of these second tier papers is to ensure that our subsequent and more specific legal policy contributions (third tier) flow directly, consistently and transparently from our integrated biblical framework. The post-Christian world is characterised by fragmentation – both social and intellectual – but Christianity is integrated: the public good of God’s creation is a single integrated picture. This means that each aspect of it is related to the others and must be seen as part of the whole.

**Third tier** ‘Legal Policy Papers’ then apply these second tier ‘public good’ insights to specific legal policy needs (responses to consultations, drafting critiques of certain Bills, or new policy proposals). This tier takes into account not only the ideal ‘good’ but also the reality of the spiritual state of society and starting from where we are in order to point helpfully to where we need to go, and considering how to present this in a secular society.

The aim of LCF’s three tier-cascade is to ensure that our members are equipped to be biblical, consistent and mutually understanding. The further one proceeds down the cascade, the more our opinions are likely to diverge amongst ourselves. But by showing one another our working in this three-tiered cascade we are able to start from the same place, identify and isolate crucial junction points, and work together for better understanding and more effective contribution for the benefit of the society around us.

## Part I: What is Marriage?

### 1. The nature of marriage

Marriage is the integrated heart of an integrated society. Marriage can only be understood in the context of the whole of created life – but from this perspective its uniqueness becomes clear.

#### **Integrated reality**

The public good is seen in the way God created and structured life to flourish as an integrated *whole*. After a structured series of seven, “God saw all that he had made, and it [*sing.*] was very good.” (Genesis 1:31). The ‘very’ is only added to the ‘good’ once humanity finally forms the centrepiece: the image of God, representing God to the world, and the world to God. Without mankind creation was incomplete – with it, creation became an integrated whole.

#### **Integrated humanity**

Humanity itself is an integrated unity. It is comprised of male and female. Hence we see the perfect interplay of unity and diversity in the first description of humanity – with its own poetic integration to match:

God created man in his own image  
in the image of God he created him  
Male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)

#### **Integrated human mandate**

This integration is further demonstrated in humanity’s mandate:

God blessed them and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food...” (Gen. 1:28, 29)

This is a single mandate for fruitfulness with two interdependent aspects: multiplication and stewardship. How can humanity possibly have dominion over everything on the earth? It must multiply, yet Adam can’t give birth to human ‘fruit’ on his own. But how can humanity survive in order to multiply? It must have dominion over the earth and have its fruit for food. The fruit of mankind and the fruit of the earth are interdependent and integrated: the repeated word ‘fruit’ is deliberate.

#### **Integrated marriage**

For both these aspects it is not good for Adam to be alone. He needs someone who is similar but different and perfectly complementary (Gen. 2:18). The male/female differences are therefore necessary to both kinds of joyful fruitfulness: the fruitfulness of building a family and the fruitfulness of productive labour – the two have become one.

It is in this context that Eve is given to Adam: “therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24) – and as Jesus commented: “What God has joined together – let not man divide.”

So, through marriage, ‘one flesh’ serves one mandate, for one humanity, in one creation, for one great aim: the joyful flourishing of life itself. This integrated oneness – diversity in unity – mirrors the life of the Trinity. God is love. He is three distinct persons in unity, each person being ‘other-centred’ – the opposite of self-centred – and from this relationship all goodness flows.

In the same way, the objective structure of marriage is to be filled subjectively by love – as the fitting completion of the two becoming one. As humanity is to reflect the God of love, so marriage is to be a showcase for the love between a man and his wife. Adam’s desires were fulfilled in joy as he celebrates Eve’s arrival with the world’s first love song (Gen. 1:23).

### **Integrated gospel**

The New Testament explains the ultimate significance of marital love. As Paul urges mutual love of man and wife in marriage he concludes: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:32). Hence: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... He who loves his wife loves himself. For no-one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” (Eph. 5:25ff)

Marriage is designed as a prophetic picture of the age to come which is brought in by the gospel. In the New Creation there will be no marriage but only the great Marriage between God and his people (Matt. 22:30, Rev.21). This, at last, is the breath-taking implication of all these patterns of integration. *God* is to be integrated with *humanity*, and humanity joined into God! Though there is forever a distinction between the Creator and his Creation, yet, mysteriously, through Jesus Christ, the two will become one, and this is the fruitfulness of the gospel story.

This relationship of the gospel to marriage also helps us to understand three important things:

- It explains why creation and hence marriage has been designed to be heterosexual. It is patterned on the relationship between God and humanity, through Christ and the church – which is the purpose of creation itself. It is this which explains the unique mystery and wonder of the love between a man and a woman, who are so *different*, and yet *fruitfully joined*.
- It explains why earthly marriage does not have ultimate significance because what matters eternally is our relationship with Jesus. This relationship is for both the single and the married, and so it explains why Christianity can provide such a clear and positive view of singleness – which has different purposes and opportunities to marriage (1 Cor. 7).
- It illustrates that, although ‘being fruitful and multiplying’ is one of the purposes of marriage, childbearing is not required for any particular marriage to be valid. Marriage finds its ultimate significance in its picture of Christ’s relationship with the church – and this does not depend on our having children.

### **Marital integration and the public good**

The relationship between the gospel and marriage explains why the integration of male and female is essential to the public good in *this* age: because the public good itself has been designed as a foretaste of eternal paradise (see *Good News of the Public Square*, our ‘Framework’).

The Bible’s most developed paradigm of flourishing creation life (‘the public good’) is seen in God’s stipulations for life in the Promised Land, which would flow with milk and honey. Through the Mosaic law, God intended to use Israel’s fruitful community life as a sophisticated prophetic

picture of the New Creation where heaven and earth are joined. As our Framework shows, although this law must be interpreted carefully in a Christ-centred way – taking into account historical and theological discontinuities – it is still the Bible’s paradigm for our blessing today.

The Mosaic law presents a detailed picture of integrated creation goodness, where we see the interdependence of fruitful family life and fruitful labour. The people as a whole comprised an interlocking group of tribes, each of which was an interlocking group of clans. In turn, each clan was an integrated group of households, and the households themselves formed groups of nuclear families. Each family was built and centred on the integration of male and female united in marriage – the cornerstone of it all. From this union flourished both family and land, as the land was received by inheritance from the previous generation, and then stewarded for the next.

Springing from marriage, within this interwoven picture of family and the stewardship of productive resources, we find that all the other strands of social reality find their accompanying integration. Health and welfare, education, employment, social networks and community celebration and rootedness all ultimately found their origin through the links and fruitfulness provided by marriage.

Marriage ensured that all aspects of human experience could be fruitfully integrated rather than fragmented. Moses urged God’s people to take the wisdom of God’s laws seriously: “They are not just idle words for you – they are your life.” (Deut. 32:45-47).

## 2. The definition of marriage

### **The Bible: marriage as an integrated whole**

Marriage is to be understood and defined by its relationship to the rest of God’s complex creation – just as the shape of a jigsaw piece is designed to fit the whole picture and can’t be redesigned or part of it removed. Marriage is therefore an integrated whole: like the patterns on a central jigsaw piece, which join together the whole picture of life in creation, *all the aspects of marriage together form one piece*. Since fruitful integration is the essence both of life and of marriage, it does not make sense to deconstruct marriage into any constituent parts – by definition marriage is irreducibly complex.

The essence of marriage is the fruitful union of male and female, from which flows everything else – procreation and family life, and also productive work and an integrated society. Heterosexuality is the keystone of marriage – or better – every aspect of marriage is heterosexual by its very nature.

Although the different aspects of marriage should not be separated from one another, they can be listed for the sake of identifying the Bible’s teaching. Christopher Ash summarises:

Marriage is the voluntary sexual and public social union of one man and one woman from different families. This union is patterned upon the union of God with his people, his bride, the Christ with his church. Intrinsic to this union is God’s calling to lifelong exclusive sexual faithfulness.<sup>1</sup>

### **Contemporary Culture**

#### *Marriage as re-arrangeable elements*

A modernist approach is likely to assume that marriage is merely a construction from reducible, separable elements – like a lego model. It examines what we see of marriage in the world – without

necessarily linking it to a prior theology or a great story of reality – and tries to reduce it to more basic constituent parts: its bricks. It tends to confuse empirical identification with definition and meaning – just as a scientific naturalist reduces reality to its sub-atomic particles and laws of nature, and concludes that there is no substantive meaning to any of it.

Thus a modern mind concludes that marriage has been constructed from five factors: sexual union, emotional union, social union, economic union, legal union, etc. Darwinian philosophy says that the combination of these has evolved incrementally: that marriage might have been different and that some aspects could be rearranged or removed – like an appendix – without noticeable loss. By way of illustration, it might be said that there is no reason why sexual union is required, or why sexual union should be heterosexual, or why it should be exclusive.

### *Marriage as private choice*

A post-modern approach will characteristically say that reality – and hence marriage – is whatever we want to say it is.

In society, unfettered individual choice has become the predominant matrix for contemporary lifestyle values, and we can see how this has grown through consumerism and existentialism. This leads society to say that marriage can be whatever we want it to be.

In law, absolute legislative choice has become a leading philosophy in law-making. This has grown partly through the philosophy of legal positivism, which claims that the law need have no intrinsic connection to what is objectively true or good about the world around us: we have a blank sheet to write upon.

By their nature these views are likely to ‘see’ marriage law through a privatised voluntarist lens, with the result that society as a whole is likely to decide that marriage is essentially the act of will between a man and a woman to commit to one another privately. Once the natural starting point has become the language of personal choice or personal commitment there is no reason why this should not lead to other choices and commitments which deviate from the creation pattern. That choice could be for a partner of the same sex, for multiple partners, or even for extremely unusual commitments which our culture would consider to be highly offensive – why not call them all marriage? But how do we know that another culture or generation would change it all again?

According to this approach, it is not essential to consider the prior significance of marriage within an ordered and unified creation. In our individualistic culture this means that fruitfulness through childbearing and the natural public integration of family and work (and hence public order) are not seen as primary or definitive concerns or characteristics of marriage. We end up with an essentially privatised and fragmented view of marriage.

This approach celebrates each piece of the jigsaw being reshaped and placed wherever it wants on the board – and tends toward a denial of the jigsaw itself. The result is that – over time – the pieces become increasingly disconnected from the other pieces, each loses its own significance, and the overall picture is distorted or lost.

While some would claim that marriage based purely on individual choice leads to individual relationships being complete, the integration which has been seen above is lost and we see an increasing pattern of brokenness and fragmentation in society.

## Part II: Why is Marriage Good?

By its original, normative design, the goodness of marriage is multi-faceted, and these are integrated. We will now examine some of these in turn.<sup>†</sup>

### 1. Integrated sexuality

Currently in English law, a marriage is voidable if it is not consummated sexually, and adultery is a ground for divorce. This is a legal recognition of the biblical reality that the sexual union between male and female is at the heart of marriage because it is the integration from which human life itself springs. “The two shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) is something which is impossible except between a man and a woman, as two sexual halves make a whole.

#### *Physically*

Sexual union in marriage unites the complementary male and female bodies. This carries the possibility of mutual delight for two people in the one act of self-giving union, and this is integrated with the possibility of the procreation of children.

#### *Spiritually*

The delight of sexual intimacy in marriage is integrated with human spirituality. Contrary to the implications of Darwinian philosophy, the design of human bodies is theologically significant. It is significant that man and wife can face one another while united sexually because the heart of the marriage union is the selfless giving of oneself to the other, just as Christ gave himself to the church, and as, within the Trinity, each of the three Persons of the Godhead is ‘other-centred’ and looks to the others in selfless love. God is love, and the delight of simultaneous mutual self-giving is part of what it means to be like God.

#### *Emotionally*

Consequently, the sexual union of marriage is emotionally integrated. God has designed intercourse as a meaningful act of communication because its purpose is to join a husband and wife together for life. Through the physical union the couple discover a powerful sense of exclusive belonging, intimacy and trust that provides for a lifelong bond that should not be broken. That is why hearts and lives are broken by casual sex – it hurts to be joined to someone and torn apart again. “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Mk. 10:9). Sharing sexual intimacy with more than one person dilutes that intimacy and strips it of its power. Sexual faithfulness is extremely important to God and to our well-being, and this is part of the life-long nature of marriage.

#### *Socially*

The sexual union of marriage is also socially integrated. Sexual union within marriage not only joins two single people into a permanent couple, but it organically produces children, and thus

---

<sup>†</sup> In this study we explore God’s *normative* design for the blessings of marriage in public life. We are very aware that, after the fall, in this complex and broken world no marriage relationship fully enjoys all of marriage’s blessings or at all times. It is important to stress that this does not make any marriage any less of a marriage. There are also many other causes of pain and struggle in the context of marriage, singleness and sexuality. In this context it is especially important that we consider the message of the good news of Jesus Christ, and his call on his family – the churches – to show his love unconditionally to everyone in our communities. We will consider this further in our conclusion below, as well as the continuing significance of norms from the perspective of law-making in pursuit of the public good.

produces a family unit. At a wedding, two become one publically, and commit to one another and, by implication, to any subsequent children. They do so publically with the approval and blessing of their community, as the beginning of a new social unit in which society itself has a rightful interest: sexuality has public significance – and broken sexuality has a significant public cost.<sup>2</sup>

### *Sociological evidence: pleasure and health*

According to the Bible, only within marriage can we find truly integrated sexuality: simultaneous physical, emotional, social and spiritual integration. As we look at the world we should expect to find resultant positive implications for sexual experience and sexual health. This is exactly what we do find.

Sociological study has suggested that sexual experiences are generally most satisfying within a lifelong marriage preceded by chastity. Through both structural equation and group comparison analyses it has been demonstrated that “sexual restraint was associated with better relationship outcomes, even when controlling for education, the number of sexual partners, religiosity, and relationship length.”<sup>3</sup> Research conducted on older couples of median relationship duration of 25 years has revealed interesting statistical relationships furthering this thesis. It was found that ‘longer relationship duration’ and ‘fewer lifetime sexual partners’ both contributed to greater relationship happiness and high sexual satisfaction in the relationship.<sup>4</sup> Evidence has also shown that those who begin cohabitation after engagement leading to marriage or after marriage acquire higher levels of satisfaction in later marriage than those who cohabit before becoming either engaged or married.<sup>5</sup>

On the other side of the coin, problems can proliferate as a result of promiscuity. While sexually promiscuous lifestyles (heterosexual and homosexual) do not cause, *per se*, sexual infections, sexual monogamy is the surest known way of avoiding sexual infections or bowel complications (associated with homosexual practices). Consider the transformation of community health that would occur if every couple honoured the marriage bed and kept it pure.

## **2. Integrated children**

Procreation is fundamental to the design of marriage, and in turn the marriage relationship provides the most secure environment, both relationally and legally, in which children can be born and raised.

### *Biological*

We have seen that marriage was ordained in part because of the need for procreation. Procreation requires both a male sperm and a female egg. As far as their design is concerned, procreation is fundamental to sexuality, and both sexuality and procreation are fundamental to marriage. This means that, normatively, children are connected genetically to both their parents. They will often share physical and personality traits. These are a significant part of the family bond, and they often help generations understand one another. Similarly, family likenesses and genetic connections join extended families in common social bonds. Before they are born children are also connected – literally – to their mother. This has a significant positive effect on the child’s relationship with his or her mother, and this blessing then forms the basis of the child’s nurture.

### *Educational*

A child’s ‘education’ therefore usually begins in the womb as a result of the integration of the biological and emotional connection with his or her mother. As they grow, children need to learn about relationships in the wider world. They need both male and female role models because humanity is composed of both male and female. Karl Barth summarised it: “Human beings are

ontologically (and not merely in appearance) male and female, and so their deepest fulfilment will come through forms of life that welcome this difference and are structured upon it”.

Historically marriage is the most secure setting for intergenerational transmission of social knowledge and skills, and reflects the understanding of marriage that has been constant across cultures and throughout history.<sup>6</sup> Children raised by married parents demonstrate positive socio-economic outcomes, in terms of educational achievement,<sup>7</sup> economic welfare,<sup>8</sup> physical and emotional health,<sup>9</sup> lack of criminal activity,<sup>10</sup> alcohol and substance abuse.<sup>11</sup> They also live according to higher standards of integrity and moral principles,<sup>12</sup> and are more likely to establish stable families themselves.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Integrated productivity and welfare

Productivity is seen in good working relationships (based on trust and the right division of labour) leading to fruitful work. Welfare is the corollary of productivity: the fruit of labour being applied back again to human relationships. The key to both is the integration of work and relationship.

#### *Integrated productivity*

Trust allows appropriate risks to be taken and teamwork to become a reality. The deepest trust that two people can know is located within the context of the marital vows of lifelong, exclusive commitment. This is a trust beyond that of family loyalty, cohabitation or mere friendship. Furthermore, the exclusive physical and emotional intimacy of the nature of sexual union within marriage, as considered above, has been designed by God to promote love and trust. In Ephesians 5:28—29, Paul argues, “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 for the church.”

Marriage makes us more productive partly because of the effect of marriage on our own character and well-being. According to Tim Keller:

A 1992 study of retirement data shows that individuals who were continuously married had 75 percent more wealth at retirement than those who never married or who divorced and did not remarry. Even more remarkably, married men have been shown to earn 10-40 percent more than do single men with similar education and job histories.

Why would this be? Some of this is because married people experience greater physical and mental health. Also, marriage provides a profound ‘shock-absorber’ that helps you navigate disappointments, illnesses, and other difficulties. You recover your equilibrium faster. But the increased earnings probably also come from what scholars call ‘marital social norms’. Studies show that spouses hold one another to greater levels of personal responsibility and self-discipline than friends or other family members can. Just to give one example, single people can spend money unwisely and self-indulgently without anyone to hold them accountable. But married people make each other practice saving, investment, and delayed gratification. Nothing can mature character like marriage.<sup>14</sup>

Productive teamwork also depends on the division of labour. We have already seen that God provided Eve not only as someone Adam would trust and love as he loved himself, but also as someone different from himself – someone who would complement and help him (Gen. 2:18). That complementarity applies not only sexually (and hence procreatively) but also to work, including childrearing. Men and women have different and complementary traits in their relations to the world in general. This does not mean that we stereotype masculinity and femininity, but it does

mean that there is a unique and God-given strength in the working partnership of a man and woman who are one flesh together.

The combination of a man and a woman is therefore the ideal partnership for sharing the management of a home and family resources. The pooling of resources between men and women and children, and shared ownership, leads to economic savings and tends to bring a standard of living better than the sum of both parties living alone. Marriage leads to a higher economic standard and diminished likelihood of ending up in poverty for men and women.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Integrated welfare*

The tasks of child-raising and stewardship of productive resources are usually intrinsically linked. Parents are naturally best placed to invest most wisely in their children's lives, who are then best placed to care for their parents in old age – and this is all naturally integrated with the family role in children's education. Family based welfare is therefore the most efficient localised welfare provision society has known. It is also the most personal, allowing for differentiated loving care in contrast to 'one size fits all' institutions and systems.

The economic consequences of social networks, both within and without the context of family, has been studied in detail by sociologists, psychologists and economists under the umbrella term 'social capital'. Studies have shown that the socialisation of society correlates with the effective creation of human capital, of wealth and the avoidance of various social problems.<sup>16</sup> The family based on marriage is one of the most effective contexts within which social capital is formed and preserved.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4. Integrated families and communities**

The biblical vision of family is that of the extended family. While the marriage relationship and immediate nuclear family took precedence within the extended family, the extended family was the key paradigm of the biblical social vision. It operated in concentric interconnected rings with the nuclear, three-generational and extended family at its centre, continuing out via the clan and tribe to the nation at its widest sphere. Integrating the whole, and at the heart of it all, we find marriage, through which families themselves are joined together. In other words, the integration of man and woman in marriage is central to the integration of community life and national life.

#### **5. Integrated public life**

Thus the institution of marriage is as much (if not more) about public life as it is about private life. It is a public social unit, and the welfare of the community depends on the welfare of its marriages. Marriage comes into existence when a public declaration is made which is recognised by the community. This may take the form of an oral ceremony, the signing of a marriage deed, or both. The point is that the relationship becomes one that is legally binding and formally recognised. As well as husband and wife becoming "one flesh", a legal union takes place.

The outcome of public union means that the 'one flesh' reality tends toward (though is not entirely) 'one legal entity' as far as the wider community is concerned. This is why, according to English law, spouses should not be required to give evidence in court against each other. It is also why, for example, husbands are presumed to be the legal fathers of (and carry legal responsibility toward) their children. Spouses can give certain medical permissions in relation to the other spouse, or receive a particular category of recognition under the intestacy rules when they lose their spouse. In other words, the public nature of marriage is of benefit to the ordering of the community.

## Conclusion: marriage and beyond

### *Marriage and the good news*

The public good must always be understood in the context of public hope. The great hope for society is the good news of Jesus Christ which changes hearts and minds, and ultimately brings Jesus Christ's return and the fullness of a new creation. This is the great Husband returning for his Bride, his people.

This gospel helps us to understand the challenges we face in the public square – to be realistic about them, and yet not despairing. It shows that ultimate meaning and significance for humanity is not found in marriage, corporate ordering, fruitful family life or fulfilling relationships – but in the hope of Jesus Christ and our relationship with him, who will establish the perfect 'public good' in the fullness of his kingdom when he returns.

It also helps us personally when we (or those around us) may be struggling in areas relating to marriage – such as bereavement, divorce, childlessness, singleness, or particular sexual struggles or temptations of all kinds – we can remember that Jesus is the great husband who gave his life for us to bring us ultimate healing and perfect relationship for eternity.

This good news leaves certain specific implications both for churches and for public authorities. In both of these spheres we should expect to find the faithful contribution of Christians, who are called to Christ-like love to everyone, and share the life-changing good news of Jesus.

### *Marriage and government*

Public authorities have a limited but clear mandate to promote the public good by encouraging and protecting those who do good in society, and punishing those who do evil and harm society (see *Good News for the Public Square*, our Framework).

This is not to expect to bring perfect relationships to society, or to design a public legal framework which somehow incorporates everyone's choices or ideas for their own lives. It is not possible to design a coherent and ordered framework which is devoid of a concept of normative human design. Rather, government is called to provide public order which accords with God-given norms because that is good for everyone. It means that we then work with the grain (rather than against the grain) of human nature. From what we have seen in this paper, it is in everyone's best interests – including the unmarried – for governments to structure society around marriage and protect it in law.

### *Marriage and churches*

Within this public order, churches are especially called to be communities of hope in which people can find relational security and lasting family love – especially those who do not have families, marriages or parents, and those who struggle with all kinds of temptations and challenges. Such churches are good news for the community at large. They point toward the great future, and they also contribute to the strength of society in this life – through strengthening marriages (for example through integrated marriage counselling within wider pastoral care) and also the lives of singles, young people and the elderly in so many ways.

Thus, while as Christians we should lovingly contribute to public life in helpful legal policy we should also make equal, if not greater, effort to help our churches, by God's grace, to become beacons of Christ's hope to a hurting world, and make a clear and positive contribution to the local communities in which we find ourselves.

## Appendix – Summary of *Good News for the Public Square*

### Summary: Informed Love

Christians should love our neighbours not only by sharing the gospel but also by doing good works – which includes assisting the government to do its God-given task by persuasively promoting good laws for our neighbours and their children. Good social ordering accords with our created design because this is how humanity thrives, and this can be demonstrated through good evidence. But where the gospel has little impact in a society, that society is less willing to accept God’s good design, despite the evidence. The remedy is both for the gospel to spread further in society and for our legal policy proposals to take realistic account of the nation’s spiritual condition. We are then to move patiently, wisely, winsomely and lovingly from where we are to where we need to be, making clear at all times in what we do and how we do it that what we propose is not self-serving but for the benefit of society as a whole.

### Four sides of the public square

*Good News for the Public Square* shows that there are four sides to every political question: authority, truth, goodness and hope. Public Authority: what is the *role* of the authorities? Public Truth: how do we *know* what is good for society? Public Good: what *is* good for society? Public Hope: how can the good be *achieved*?

Christians should answer these four questions in the light of the wider gospel context to which they all point – the story of the ultimate public square – the kingdom of God. When Jesus said: “I AM the way, the truth and the life”, he was not only referring to ‘spiritual’ reality but he set the framework for a Christian worldview. Everything in creation was made through him, and is to be restored through his kingdom.

As ‘I AM’ Christ himself is the source and goal of all *authority* in heaven and earth. As ‘the Truth’ he is the basis and revelation of all that is true about reality. As ‘the Life’ everything was created through him to thrive, patterned on him in its creation *goodness* – and the same is true of the renewed creation of the eternal age to come to which this life points. As ‘the Way’ he is the *hope* and means by which creation is restored as humanity is reunited to God in him. Therefore the gospel gives the basis for answering each of our four public square questions. Importantly, the gospel shows how the limitations of the temporal public square both point to the ultimate ‘public square’ of Christ’s greater kingdom, and also create civil freedoms now.

**Public Authority:** God has lovingly instituted public authority to love: to promote the public good by commending ‘good’ and punishing evil. However it has limited authority under God’s authority. It must not reach beyond public jurisdiction into private life – after all, only the gospel can change hearts. Thus the gospel’s limitation of political authority is the intellectual basis for civil freedom.

**Public Truth:** What is ‘good’ for society depends on what is true about society. We can know what is true about the world because both we and it were created coherently through Christ. By his incarnation he reconciles us to the truth about the world and shows us more clearly what it is. This means that although sinful humanity can partially understand the world, we can only see the world truly when we also accept the gospel – with it comes all of the Bible’s revelation about society.

**Public Good:** God has designed the world as a coherent reality which is structured to flourish in life – this was created ‘very good’ for us. In God’s law we find the most developed specification of God’s creational design for human relationships. To encourage flourishing, law should order society in a way that accords with our design. However, life can only be truly and contentedly enjoyed when we know the life and law of God in our hearts. Only the gospel message brings this to us, and it also gives flourishing life for eternity.

**Public Hope:** Perfect laws don’t change hearts. People only consistently want what is best for them when the Holy Spirit changes their hearts. So we need the gospel to spread in order to see lasting change. Just as we don’t compel faith, we don’t compel people to adopt good law, especially what they cannot bear. Taking account of the spiritual state of society, we should start from where we are now and seek to move to where we want to be. Christians should set the example: sharing the gospel and loving our neighbours by gracious and persuasive law reform – for everyone’s benefit.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God (Leicester: IVP, 2003)*, 73, In this regard the status of Marriage within the law of England and Wales has been defined in the similar terms: Per Lord Penzance in *Hyde v Hyde and Woodmansee* (1866) LR 1 P and D 130 “the voluntary union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others” and this is still the law and was confirmed as recently as 2007 when Sir Mark Potter referred to it in Wilkinson and Kitzinger [2007] 1 FLR 295.
- <sup>2</sup> See, for example, Guy Brandon, *Just Sex?* (2009).
- <sup>3</sup> Busby, D. M., Carroll, J. S., & Willoughby, B. J. (2010). The effects of sexual timing on marriage relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(6), 766-774. doi: 10.1037/a0021690.
- <sup>4</sup> Heiman, J. R., Long, J. S., Smith, S. N., Fisher, W. A., Sand, M. S., & Rosen, R. C. (2011). Sexual Satisfaction and Relationship Happiness in Midlife and Older Couples in Five Countries. *Archive of Sexual Behaviour*, 40(4), 741-753. DOI: 10.1007/s10508-010-9703-3.
- <sup>5</sup> Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). The pre-engagement cohabitation effect: A replication and extension of previous findings. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23(1), 107-111. doi: 10.1037/a0014358.
- <sup>6</sup> Lynn d. Wardle – Multiply and replenish – p780.
- <sup>7</sup> Parke, M. (2003). Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? *Centre for Law and Social Policy, policy brief: 3*.
- <sup>8</sup> Lerman, R. I. (2002). How Do Marriage, Cohabitation, and Single Parenthood Affect the Material Hardships of Families With Children? *Urban Institute and American University*. and Lerman, R. I. (2002). Married and Unmarried Parenthood and Economic Well-Being: A Dynamic Analysis of a Recent Cohort. *Urban Institute and American University*.
- <sup>9</sup> Frank. F. Furstenburg and Andrew Cherlin, *Divided Families; What Happens to Children When Parents Part* (1991), 56 and Paul R. Amato, ‘Children’s Adjustment to Divorce: Theories, Hypothesis, and Empirical Support’, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 23 (1993), cited in Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (2010), p.224.
- <sup>10</sup> Harper, C. & McClanahan, S. (2004). Father Absence and Youth Incarceration. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 14, 369-397.
- <sup>11</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. (2005). *Family Matters: Substance Abuse and the American Family* (17); and, Flewelling, R. L. & Bauman, K. E. (1990). Family Structure as a Predictor of Initial Substance Abuse and Sexual Intercourse in Adolescence. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52, 171-181.
- <sup>12</sup> Furstenburg and Cherlin (see note 9 above), cited in Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (2010), p.224.
- <sup>13</sup> Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D., ‘The Child Abuse Crisis: The Disintegration of Marriage, Family and the American Community’, *Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder #115* (May 15, 1997), [www.heritage.org/Research/Family/BG115.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/BG115.cfm) and E. Thompson, T. L. Hanson, and S.S. McLanahan, ‘Family Structure and Child Well-Being: Economic Resources versus Parental Behaviours’, *Social Forces* 73: 221-42: cited in ‘The Verdict on Cohabitation vs. Marriage’, [www.marriageandfamilies.byu.edu/issues/2001/January/cohabitation.htm](http://www.marriageandfamilies.byu.edu/issues/2001/January/cohabitation.htm)., cited in Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (2010), p.225.
- <sup>14</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox, ed., *The State of Our Unions: Marriage in America*, 2009 (The National Marriage Project, University of Virginia), ‘The Surprising Economic Benefits of Marriage’, 86, cited in Keller, Tim, *The Meaning of Marriage* (2011).
- <sup>15</sup> David J. Eggebeen and Daniel T. Lichter, ‘Race, Family Structure, and Changing Poverty Among American Children’, *American Social Review* 56: 801, 806, cited in Wardle, ‘Is Preference for Marriage in Law Justified?’, cited in cited in Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (2010), p.225.
- <sup>16</sup> See for example: Helliwell, J. F., & Putnam, R. D. (2004). The Social Context of Well-Being. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 359(1449), 1435-1446. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2004.1522
- <sup>17</sup> See generally Kirby, J. (2002). *Broken Hearts: Family decline and the consequences for society*. London: Centre for Policy Studies.