

Position Paper: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage.

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Introduction:

Marriage is one of God's greatest gifts to us. It can be a source of incredible joy and intimacy and can also be a source of great pain and sorrow. Marriage was God's idea (Gen. 2:18-25). To be all that God intended marriage must be regulated by His Divine instructions (Ps 127:1; Eph. 5).

Marriage:

Marriage is a Divine institution (Gen. 2:18-25) regulated by Divine Instructions (Ps. 127:1 Eph. 5) and is also the supreme illustration of the love relationship that God established with His people (Is. 54:5; Jer. 3:8; Hos. 2:19-20 Eph. 5:22-32). For followers of Jesus, marriage is a sacred lifelong covenant; an institution established by God to enable a man and a woman to become one flesh, a thorough merging of the two personalities into one life that cannot be and must not be separated. Believers through the life of Christ in them have the power to live this restored, originally intended view of marriage. The union is indissoluble. Believers must be called to this and nothing less to fulfill the law of Christ (Mk 10:11-12; Mt. 19:3-9; Lk. 16:18) Marriage is based upon a covenant between a man and a woman: the key ingredient being faithfulness – two parties being committed irreversibly to the fulfillment of their covenant obligations. The most important factor in the marriage covenant is not romance; it is faithfulness to the word of God expressed in the covenant vows, even if romance comes and goes. Marriage involves a 'whole person' commitment where two people give themselves unreservedly to teach other (Gen. 2:24; 1Cor. 7:3-4) "*What God has joined together let no man separate*" declared Jesus (Mt; 19:6) "Till death do us part," is a sober reflection of God's intention regarding marriage (cf. Rom 7:2-3; 1Cor. 7:39). Therefore the pastoral staff and/or the facilities of Grace Community Church will be used/will officiate or co-officiate only in marriages between believers and only in cases of remarriage that are consistent with this policy.

Divorce:

Divorce is abhorrent to God (Mal. 2:15-16).

Divorce is always the result of sin. God's basic intention for marriage never included divorce; but when sin entered human experience, God's intention was distorted and marred. Under perfect conditions there was no provision for divorce, but God allowed divorce to become a reality because of man's sinfulness (Deut. 24:1-4; Mt. 19:7-8). To say that divorce is always the result of sin is not to say, however, that all divorce is itself sin. It may be the only way to deal with the sinfulness of the other party, which has violated the one-flesh principle of marriage.

There are two conditions under which we believe divorce is Biblically permissible. Since divorce is a sinful distortion of God's intention for marriage, it is an alternative of last recourse, and to be taken only under biblical circumstances. We believe Scripture teaches that there are two circumstances in which divorce is permitted (though never required):

- a. in the case of *porneia* [Mt. 19:9], (Greek for sexually immoral actions that would clearly break the one-flesh principle of marriage: acts of adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, pedophilia, and incest
- b. and in the case of desertion of a believing partner by an unbelieving spouse (1Cor. 7:15-16) (see also "desertion by a 'believing' spouse below)

Divorce carries with it consequences and complications: Divorce, because it is a departure from God's plan, carries with it painful consequences and complications. God has made perfect provisions for the complete forgiveness of all our sin through the death of Christ, including the sins of sexual unfaithfulness and unjustified divorce (1Pet. 2:24; Col. 2:13.) Forgiveness however does not remove the temporal consequences of our sins, or the pain and grief involved in the death of relationship. The church is called to minister to individuals and families suffering from these consequences, and to seek to help them respond with spiritual maturity to their problems.

Reconciliation is to be preferred to divorce. While divorce is permitted (in the limited circumstances listed above) it is never commanded. Forgiveness and reconciliation are always to be seen as the higher good biblically (1Cor. 7:10-11). (Briarwood)

What if there have been no biblical grounds for divorce but two believers decide to dissolve their marriage because they are 'incompatible'? *The Scriptures do not recognize incompatibility as grounds for divorce. Reconciliation must be achieved, and every means possible should be undertaken including counseling and church discipline if necessary.* (Briarwood) *The Scriptures do not recognize "emotional abandonment."*

In the case of covenantors, the elder board, or its designee, will determine whether a divorce is permissible after efforts at reconciliation have been fully exhausted. In matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage, regular attendees who have not formally covenanted with Grace Community Church are also subject to elder authority. Each Covenant Class should be instructed in the stipulations of this policy and given a copy of its terms.

Remarriage/Separation:

1. *Remarriage is permitted where the former spouse is deceased (Rom. 7:2; 1Cor. 7:39)*
2. *Remarriage is permitted where a divorce occurred prior to conversion “ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation the old has gone, the new has come!” (2Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:1). If the former marriage partner has also become a believer, remarriage to that partner should be sought. Marriage of believers is intended to be permanent (Mt. 19:6b). Where the former partner has not been converted, and attempts to share the Gospel with him/her are rejected, however, remarriage to that person would be disobedient to Scripture (2Cor. 6:14)*
3. *Where a divorce has occurred on Scriptural grounds, the offended party is free to remarry. (1Cor. 7:15).*
4. *What about desertion by a “believing” spouse?*
1 Corinthians 7 deals specifically with the case of a non-believer who refuses to live with a believing spouse. The question then arises as to the remarriage of a believer who was divorced by a partner who also professed to be a believer. Such a situation should involve the church in the steps of disciplinary action outlined in Matt. 18. A Christian who decides to walk out of marriage without Biblical cause is in violation of Scripture. Such a person who refuses the counsel and authority of the elders and persists in following the course of disobedience ultimately is to be dealt with as though he/she is an unbeliever (Mt. 18:17). The deserted spouse would then be in a position of having been deserted by one whose sinful behavior and unresponsiveness to spiritual admonition gives evidence of an unregenerate heart, and thus falls under the provision of 1Cor. 7:15.
5. *We believe Scripture does not absolutely forbid remarriage of a person who has caused a divorce. Where there has been conversion (in the case of a person who was not a believer when the divorce occurred) or the demonstration of genuine and heartfelt repentance (in the case of one who was a believer at the time of the divorce), remarriage to a believer may be permitted for the offending party if the former spouse died or remarried(1 Cor. 7:8,9,15; Mt. 19:9).*
6. *Scripture recognizes the possibility of separation that does not lead to divorce. (1Cor. 7:11).*
7. *Remarriage would be supported if already in place, although an examination of the circumstances and appropriate counseling (including confession and repentance) may be in order during the covenanting process.*
8. ***The pastoral staff and/or facilities of Grace Community Church will only be utilized in a remarriage situation that is permitted biblically by one of the above criteria.***
9. ***Each case of potential remarriage or separation will be handled on a case by case basis after review by the elder board or its designee upon the recommendation by a pastor.***
10. ***Determinations on remarriage and separation will be made with wisdom, and grace measured by the cross, and an examination of the heart for those who have fallen.***

Sources:

The Holy Bible

Pamphlet: Briarwood Presbyterian Church (PCA): Guidelines for Marriage and Divorce

Brochure: Divorce and Remarriage: A Pastoral Letter from the Elders of the Chapel Hill Bible Church.

Ad Interim Committee Report on Divorce and Remarriage to the Twentieth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

Samuele Bacchiocchi Ph. D. Andrews Univ. – [The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage. Chapter 7: “Divorce and Remarriage Today.”](http://www2.andrews.edu/~samuele/books/marriage)<http://www2.andrews.edu/~samuele/books/marriage>