



# Divorce and Remarriage

## Elder Position Paper

Marriage is a public covenant between one man and one woman for life, sealed with a sexual relationship (Gen 2:24-25; Matt 19:3-9; Mal 2:14; Rom 7:2). While God created marriage to last as long as both spouses are alive, divorce is sometimes a reality in a sin-laden world. Jesus teaches that divorce was never God's intention, though He does make provision for it in some instances. He did this in limited cases under the Old Covenant (Deut 24:1-4), and under the New Covenant, the instances where divorce is permitted are even more explicit. God nowhere commands anyone to divorce, though we understand Scripture to teach that divorce is permitted in the following limited instances:

- (1) sexual immorality (i.e., adultery, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, and likewise egregious sexual infidelity; Matt 5:32, 19:9);
- (2) abandonment of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:12-16); and
- (3) possibly "in such cases" (1 Cor 7:15) as would be considered fundamental abandonment of the marriage covenant by an unbeliever, such as unrepentant spousal or child abuse, refusal to provide for one's family, etc.<sup>1</sup>

In every instance where divorce is being considered by a Christian, the elders of the believer's local church should be closely involved in counseling and caring for the innocent spouse, as well as calling the sinning spouse to repentance if he or she is part of the church. Each situation is different, and prayerful biblical wisdom is needed to faithfully apply the Bible's teaching on divorce.

Divorce is always the least desirable option in a marriage and reconciliation should always be pursued wherever possible. Implicit in the fact that God allows divorce in limited cases, however, is His permission

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture specifies that abandonment may only be grounds for divorce in cases where a believing spouse is abandoned by an unbelieving spouse because in cases where a believing spouse is abandoning or harming another believer in marriage, the Church should be involved in swiftly addressing the sin in church discipline. If the Christian under church discipline refuses to repent and church discipline is carried out to the fullest extent, this gives no basis on which to consider the sinning person a genuine believer. At this point, they are considered an unbeliever, and the marital situation changes.

for remarriage; though a Christian is only permitted to marry another Christian (1 Cor 7:39). In cases where there has been a divorce of two believers that is sinful (i.e., not because of adultery or abandonment), the spouses are instructed to either remain single or to reconcile and remarry (1 Cor 7:10-11), the latter option being preferable (though not commanded). Remarriage after a wrongful divorce may be permitted in three instances when reconciliation is impossible:

- (1) if one spouse remarries, which would constitute adultery;
- (2) if one spouse proves or professes to be an unbeliever while the other spouse follows Christ; and
- (3) if one spouse has died.

As with cases of potential divorce when a believer is involved, the elders of the couple's church should be ministering and giving counsel to believing members who are considering remarriage after an unlawful divorce. Furthermore, just as divorce is never commanded, neither is remarriage after divorce.

We affirm the goodness of marriage, the painfulness of sin, and the complex brokenness that is involved in the dissolution of a family. We desire that divorced spouses and their children find hope and healing in Christ, as well as faithful love and ministry within the local Church. We desire that Sun Valley Church in particular would be such a voice of hope and healing, love and care. We desire to help divorced believers under our shepherding care to walk in the forgiveness that Christ offers where they have sinned, and to forgive where they have been sinned against – forgiveness which they are called to give, even though reconciliation of a marriage may not be possible (Eph 4:32). Even when a divorce takes place, the great marriage of Christ and His Church to which marriage points is still a glorious reality, and it is in this Gospel hope that we should move forward! When a sinful remarriage takes place, we believe that while it begins adulterously, it does not continue adulterously; God desires at that point that the new marriage seek to glorify and show Christ to the fullest extent possible, by His grace.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Helpful resources in navigating the Bible's teaching on divorce and remarriage include: Wayne Grudem, *What the Bible Says About Divorce and Remarriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021); Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017); and "The Biblical Position on Divorce and Remarriage," *The Elders' Perspective Series* (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Community Church, 2001).