

Crossroads Community Church Divorce and Remarriage Position Paper

MARRIAGE

God is profoundly serious about the sacredness of marriage, and as His followers and servants, it is our privilege to share this high view. Recently, each passing year has brought a steady increase in both the number of divorces and ease with which one can file for divorce in our culture. Therefore, it is more important than ever to reiterate the wisdom and goodness of God's plan for marriage.

In His creation of Adam and Eve as husband and wife, God designed marriage to be lifelong, covenantal, monogamous and only between male and female. In addition, Scripture also explicitly commands that a believer is not to be "joined together" with an unbeliever.

Conclusion: The purpose of marriage as God's unique creation is to display His glory. Marriage is a portrait of God's relation to His people and Jesus' love for the church and, therefore, how the church should be devoted to Christ.

Suggested Scripture Study: Genesis 2:18-24, Malachi 2:14-16, Matthew 19:3-6, Romans 7:2, 1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 5:22-33

DIVORCE

Divorce always involves unfaithfulness to the solemn covenant of marriage that male and female have entered into before Him. The covenant's severing always brings harmful consequences to those partners and their children. (Malachi 2:14-16) Because of God's love for people, God hates divorce. He hates divorce itself but not those who are divorced. The pain of divorce permeates both secular culture and the church. With sensitive hearts, we weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15) because of divorce. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin, but it does result from sin and hardness of heart. Divorce is never God's best. Anyone who loves God and knows of

His goodness would never consider it without seeking to understand and heed what the Bible teaches, as well as appropriate spiritual counsel.

Given the tremendous emotional pain involved with this topic, we seek to be clear, compassionate, and careful when sharing our convictions. Our heart's desire is faithfulness to God's Word and love for God's people.

With God's help, a marriage can survive even the worst sins. Since divorce is not part of God's original plan for marriage, all believers should hate divorce as God does, and pursue it only when there is no other recourse.

Just as we never encourage anyone to rush into marriage, we likewise never encourage anyone to rush out of marriage. When divorce is permitted biblically as explained below, it is to be done as an expression of love and in hopes of producing repentance. Divorce is never to be considered the end of a relationship, but rather a severe mercy that will hopefully lead to the eventual restoration of the relationship, even if the marriage itself is not restored.

In Matthew 19:3-9, Christ teaches clearly that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin that violates God's original purpose for the intimate unity and permanence of the marriage bond (Genesis 2:24). He taught that God's law allowed divorce only because of "hardness of heart" (Matthew 19:8).

There are two exception clauses found in Scripture regarding divorce:

1. *Sexual Immorality:* The "exception clause" for divorce in Matthew 19:3-9 which mentions sexual immorality (porneia) is not a permission slip or loophole which would allow or in any way recommend divorce as an appropriate action for an offended Christ follower. "Porneia" is a general term that encompasses sexual sin that is physical in nature outside the marriage of one biological man and one biological women.

When one partner violates the unity and intimacy of marriage by physical, sexual sin and, in doing so, forsakes his or her covenant obligation, the faithful partner finds themselves in a challenging and vulnerable situation. Just as God's gracious covenant of love ultimately overcomes Israel's infidelity (Jeremiah 3), the covenant love modeled by God's people can, and should, overcome the immense pain and hurt of infidelity.

As a result, when a spouse has been unfaithful, we are committed to counsel the faithful spouse to uphold the sacredness of the marriage covenant by both granting forgiveness and seeking reconciliation (rather than expeditiously pointing him or her to the exception).

Conclusion: Scripture allows for divorce when a spouse has committed physical sexual sin, e.g. adultery. However, even in cases of adultery, divorce is never the first option considered and should rarely be the final option taken. We are fully committed to wisely and cautiously counsel toward repentance and restoration of the relationship. Though the humble work of forgiving, peacemaking and reconciliation may not be easy, the effort is worth seeing God glorified and His children walking in the light.

Suggested Scripture to Study: Genesis 2:18-24, Malachi 2:14-16, Jeremiah, Hosea, Matthew 19:3-9, Mark 10:1-12, Luke 16:18, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Colossians 1:19-22

2. Abandonment: The second exception clause for permitting a divorce occurs when an unbelieving spouse physically abandons his or her believing spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Because “God has called us to peace” (v. 15), divorce is allowed and may be preferable in such situations. When an unbeliever desires to leave, trying to keep him or her in the marriage may only create greater tension and conflict.

Should the unbelieving spouse choose to leave the marital relationship permanently, but is unwilling to file for divorce, perhaps because of lifestyle, irresponsibility, or to avoid monetary obligations, then the believing spouse may be in an impossible situation of having legal and moral obligations that he or she cannot fulfill. Because “the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Corinthians 7:15) and is therefore no longer obligated to remain married, the believer may file for divorce without fearing God’s disapproval.

Conclusion: A tenderhearted marriage consisting of two Christ-followers is always God’s “ideal.” Hard hearts cannot support a marriage, and it is not uncommon to find a hard heart in the midst of a “mixed” marriage (i.e., one composed of a believing and an unbelieving spouse). Scripture prohibits a

“mixed” marriage, however once it exists, allows for divorce when an unbelieving spouse insists on abandoning a believing spouse.

Suggested Scripture Study: 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 14-16, 1 Peter 3:1-2

REMARRIAGE

While there is a broad range of convictions on the issue of divorce among serious students of Scripture, there is an even greater variety of positions when it comes to remarriage.

Before we ask when/if remarriage after divorce is permissible, we must consider the viability and possibility of reconciliation. Even in the most heartbreaking cases of sexual immorality and the most perplexing cases of abandonment, as long as the former spouse has not remarried or is not deceased, we believe that reconciliation is a viable option that must be considered.

While in a season where the possibility of reconciliation exists, we believe it best honors Jesus that one should remain single or be reconciled in marriage to the ex-spouse.

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner only when the divorce was on biblical grounds, either (1) physical sexual sin or (2) abandonment by an unbelieving spouse. In fact, the purpose for a biblical divorce is to make clear that the faithful partner is free to remarry, but only in the Lord (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians. 7:39).

Those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God and their partners, and for them to marry another is an act of “adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). This is why Paul says that a believing woman who sinfully divorces should “remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” (1 Corinthians. 7:10-11). If she repents from her sin of unbiblical divorce, the true fruits of that repentance would be to seek reconciliation with her former husband (Matthew 5:23-24). The same is true for a man who divorces un-biblically (1 Corinthians. 7:11).

The Bible also gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds and the

possibility of reconciliation remains, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12).

Suggested Scripture Study: Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Matthew 19:3-9, Mark 10:1-12, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:2, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 15, 39

Pre-conversion Divorce

According to 1 Corinthians 7:20-27, there is nothing in salvation that demands a particular social or marital status. The Apostle Paul, therefore, instructs believers to recognize that God providentially allows the circumstances they find themselves in when they come to Christ. If they were saved while divorced, and clearly cannot be reconciled to their former spouse, then they are free to either remain single or be remarried to another believer (1 Corinthians. 7:39; 2 Corinthians. 6:14).

Repentance and Forgiveness

In cases where divorce took place on unbiblical grounds and the guilty partner(s) later repent(s), the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. A sign of true repentance will be a desire to implement 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, which would involve a willingness to pursue reconciliation with his or her former spouse, if that is possible. If reconciliation is not possible, then the forgiven believer could pursue another relationship under the careful guidance and counsel of church leadership.

In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on unbiblical grounds and remarried, he or she is guilty of the sin of adultery until that sin is confessed (Mark 10:11-12). God does forgive that sin immediately when genuine confession and repentance takes place, and there is nothing in Scripture to indicate anything other than that. From that point on the believer should continue in his or her current marriage.

Response of the Church

Believers who pursue divorce on unbiblical grounds are subject to church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God. The one who

obtains an unbiblical divorce and remarries is guilty of adultery since God did not permit the original divorce (Matt. 5:32; Mark 10:11-12). That person is subject to the steps of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17.

In Conclusion

We ask that grace and understanding be extended toward our positions and convictions even as we extend that to our brothers and sisters who find broader freedom before the Lord. We pray that the love, care, sensitivity, and humility we have sought in writing this document would be evident to all who read it and may be affected by our leadership.

It would seem appropriate to conclude this statement by expressing our gratitude that the cross of Christ is sufficient to cover all of our sin, and we pray with you that His Spirit continually guides us into all truth.