



# Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

## Introduction

This paper sets forth a perspective on marriage, divorce and remarriage that is consistent with Scripture. It also issues a strong exhortation and warning to those heading to marriage or already married, that God places covenant expectations on each spouse. When these covenant expectations are met, marriages thrive under the blessing of God.

Let it be known that we are for marriage. Consequently, we insist that those entering into marriage be aware of the responsibilities it places on them. Marriage is a solemn covenant, enacted before the very face of God and it comes with strict expectations from God. When they are unmet, the covenant is at great risk. When unrighteous behavior batters the marriage covenant, the relationship becomes weak and may break. In some cases where the covenant is broken God allows divorce. But in every case, behavior that does not strengthen the marriage covenant is damaging to the harmony and happiness God has instilled in marriage from the beginning.

As Elders we feel a responsibility not only to speak to the issues of divorce and remarriage, and the various biblical issues surrounding them, but also to make it known that unrighteous behavior that acts contrary to the expectations of God is not only sin against God but the means of self-inflicted heartache and pain for the marriage.

Divorce can be the end result when one or both spouses, through ongoing sexual immorality, display a consistent disregard for, and rebellion against these covenant stipulations to such a degree that the covenant is no longer renewable. It is the cumulative effect of these sinful behaviors that actually breaks the marriage covenant. Divorce is simply the judicial means of ending the legal responsibilities the covenant placed on both spouses. To be clear: Sin is what breaks the covenant; the legal step of divorce merely does away with the legalities attached to the covenant.

As Elders and Staff called by God to serve His people and bring the light of Christ to the world, we consider ourselves to be under the authority of Christ and the Bible. As such our beliefs and actions pertaining to the issues surrounding marriage, divorce, and remarriage will be aligned with our understanding of the pertinent biblical material, and sound, orthodox, pastoral tradition. While the brevity of this policy does not allow for a thorough discussion and presentation of the relevant, underlying Biblical support for our stated beliefs and actions, we stand ready to demonstrate from the Scriptures that they are biblically based and aligned with the commandments and truth of Almighty God.

*(For information regarding weddings, and the participation of Grace Baptist Church pastoral staff, see the Wedding Policy).*

# I. Marriage

Marriage was instituted by God and is to be regulated according to His word revealed in the Bible. God's love for His people has been illustrated by marriage throughout biblical history. Under the Old Covenant, He related to the nation of Israel as her husband. In the New Covenant Christ, as the husband of the church illustrates how all spouses are to love one another. God designed marriage as a permanent relationship between one man and one woman, expecting Christians and non-Christians to maintain that standard. We believe that marriage is God's creation, and is only between one man and one woman. As servants of Christ we will not perform marriages that are other than between one man and one woman, for to do so would be to rebel against our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is clear from Scripture that those who enter into marriage are actually enacting a covenant relationship with God as their witness. As with all covenants, the marriage covenant comes with specific stipulations that are to be kept with the understanding that God is watching. Malachi 2:13,14 says *"This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 'Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."*

The Bible also gives us an understanding of the expectations God places on those within the marriage covenant. In Genesis 2:24 we find the first commandment from God concerning marriage: *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."* That faithfulness in this "one flesh" intimacy is a foundational expectation as seen in the 7th commandment's prohibition of adultery: "You shall not commit adultery." Throughout Scripture sexual fidelity is seen as a covenant stipulation for all who marry.

While there are many covenant expectations placed on spouses it is apparent that they were grouped into major areas by God and the biblical writers. One important text is Exodus 21:10,11: *"If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. 'If he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money."*

This text speaks to the issue of a man who takes a slave as a wife, and then later decides he doesn't want her. The law demanded that he still owed her those things that were owed a wife. What is important to us here is that we find the broad grouping of what God understood as the stipulations and expectations contained in the marriage covenant. In addition to sexual faithfulness, the marriage covenant came with these three stipulations: food, clothing, and conjugal rights. Over time, these expectations came to form the basis of wedding vows even as they were summarized in three areas: physical, emotional, and conjugal.

We believe that those entering into marriage have responsibilities before God to provide well for the physical, emotional, and conjugal needs of their spouse. This lies at the heart of marriage, along with the fourth expectation of sexual faithfulness. Where any of these goes lacking the marriage covenant becomes weakened and the happiness and satisfaction of the marital relationship greatly diminished. If you want to please God and enjoy marriage to the fullest, look well to your responsibility to provide the best for your spouse in these areas.

Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:3,4 is not only necessary for church unity. It is also essential for marital health and happiness: *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."* Marriage is essentially about caring for your spouse, as the stipulation of the marriage covenant illustrates.

Lastly, we also strongly believe that marriage between Christ-followers brings with it a fifth covenant stipulation: the mutual obligation to provide for one another's spiritual progress. As the leader of the home, the husband is primarily responsible to make sure that the household walks in the ways of righteousness, that the Bible is held in high esteem, studied, and obeyed, and that the family prizes their participation in the mission of Christ through the local church. Wives as well are to be intentional about being used of God in the family since all Christ-followers are called to "consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24).

In summary, marriage is a covenant relationship, enacted before the very face of Almighty God. The demands of the covenant include physical, emotional, conjugal, and spiritual provision as well as sexual fidelity. These five areas comprise the structure of the marriage covenant. Where they are strong, marriage flourishes. Where they are neglected, marriage flounders. In certain situations where the covenant stipulations are broken it may lead to the marriage being irreparable. It is here that divorce may come into play.

## II. Divorce

We realize that the subject of divorce has been a source of difference and division in the church for many years. It is not our intent to settle all the arguments but rather to state the considerations that will govern our thinking and acting in times when those in the Grace family are considering divorce.

Therefore, the following represents the conclusions of the Elder Team who take seriously their call to handle the word of truth accurately, hold fast the faithful word of God, and exhort fellow Christians in sound doctrine.

While God does allow divorce in certain situations as explained below, it is also true that God Himself is shown to be an example of perseverance even in the midst of the most trying marital circumstances. Over and over in the Old Testament His bride — Israel — was unfaithful. Yet, even when the marriage covenant was broken by her unfaithfulness God remained faithful to her and renewed the covenant time after time. The story of Hosea illustrates this point well.

But according to Jeremiah 3:6–8 we read that at some point the unfaithfulness of Israel brought the relationship to a point where the covenant was irreparable: *"Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, 'Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. I thought, 'After she has done all these things she will return to Me'; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 'And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.'"*

It is our hope that, even when the marriage covenant is broken, there will be time given for repentance to take place and the covenant to be renewed. However, we realize that God understands the heart of those who have remained faithful in the face of an unfaithful, unrepentant spouse. Given that unfaithfulness has broken the marriage covenant to pieces He allows divorce whereby the legal obligations of the covenant can be set aside. Situations where this may occur are described below.

### **A. Divorce between two Christ-followers**

Paul speaks directly to this situation in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11: *“But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.”*

If two Christians divorce they are to remain unmarried or else be reconciled (remarried) to one another. Remarriage to someone other than their former spouse is disallowed.

However it must be noted that this is not considered a righteous option. Paul clearly says that the Christian wife and husband should not seek to leave their believing spouse. The only exception would be if immorality occurred. (See explanation of “immorality” under C below.)

The fact that this situation does not come with the allowance to remarry clearly demonstrates that divorce between Christ-followers is not sanctioned by God. The statement prohibiting remarriage simply prevents the divorced spouses from compounding their unrighteousness by marrying again which would be adultery.

### **B. Divorce between a Christian and a non-Christian**

Paul also speaks directly to the situation that arises when a non-Christian spouse desires to leave their Christian spouse. In 1 Corinthians 7:12–16 we read *“But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. <sup>15</sup> Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such [cases], but God has called us to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”*

It is clear that divorce should never be pursued in these cases unless the unbelieving spouse wants out of the marriage. The mere fact that a believer is married to an unbeliever must never be seen as a reason to be less than righteous in carrying out the stipulations of the marriage covenant. However, if the unbeliever wants to leave the marriage, despite the best efforts of the believer, then divorce is allowed. The believer is not held responsible by God to keep the unbeliever from leaving the marriage.

It is important to note that it is the unbeliever’s sin in leaving the marriage that ultimately breaks the marriage covenant, putting it in an irreparable state. The divorce, which God allows, merely dissolves the legal obligations that the now broken covenant had previously placed on both spouses.

## C. Divorce in Cases of Immorality

In Matthew 5:31, 32 Jesus declared *“It was said, ‘whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”*

In Jesus’ day the Law had become so widely interpreted that many believed divorce was allowable for any cause as long as the husband gave his wife a certificate showing that she was now single and free to be married. Jesus takes the crowd back to the initial heart of God in announcing that divorce was allowable only on the grounds of sexual unfaithfulness.

It appears that, of the four stipulations of the marriage covenant — physical, emotional, conjugal, and sexual fidelity — it is in the continual disregard of sexual faithfulness that the marriage covenant is truly broken. Again, it must be recognized that it is the immorality that breaks the covenant, not the divorce. The divorce merely dissolves the legal obligations of the marriage.

“Unchastity” (translated from the Greek word *porneia*) was understood in Jesus’ day to include any sexual behavior that was considered “unlawful”. In our culture the whole range of meaning for *porneia* is being challenged. In Jesus’ day it would certainly have been synonymous with intercourse between non-married entities. Today questions of oral copulation, and other non-intercourse types of sexual gratification strain our understanding of what Jesus originally meant, and this presents a great challenge to us as church leaders.

As the Elders of Grace Baptist Church we believe that, where sexual fulfillment is sought and attained with the active and willing participation of someone other than a spouse, it may rise to the level of *porneia*. Such behavior is abhorrent to God, in grave opposition to the expectations of the marriage covenant, and if continued without repentance, may break the marriage covenant and establish permissible grounds for divorce.

## III. Remarriage

The Bible is clear that, where divorce is sanctioned by God, remarriage is also permitted for the spouse who has remained faithful. However, it must be clearly understood that divorce is never commanded or mandated and it is always a righteous choice to remain married in order to seek the renewal of the marriage covenant.

That remarriage is allowable where divorce is permitted is seen from an examination of the texts that speak to this issue. The first place we find divorce mentioned is in Deuteronomy 24:1 where Moses describes the fact that a husband who no longer finds favor in his wife, and decides to send her away, must give her a “certificate of divorce.” This written termination of marriage — called a “get” — had only one purpose: to certify that the woman was no longer married, and was thus, free to marry. When asked about the reason behind the “get” Jesus answered in Matthew 19:8: *“Because of hardness of heart Moses permitted you do divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been this way.”*



Jesus points out that the “get” or “certificate of divorce” was instituted to provide for, and protect the women of Israel. Without it, their husbands could send them out with no way to provide for themselves. They could not own land, and without proof of singleness they could not marry. Their only option was harlotry. To secure for them the opportunity to marry, God demanded through Moses that the husbands give their castoff wives a certificate stating that they were single. Its only purpose was to grant them the freedom and ability to marry.

This carries over into the New Testament view of divorce and remarriage. Where divorce was sanctioned by God it always allowed for remarriage. Where it was not sanctioned, remarriage was not allowed, and where it occurred it constituted adultery.

### **A. Remarriage in the Case of Abandonment by an Unbelieving Spouse**

As mentioned above Paul allows for remarriage for a believer when their unbelieving spouse chooses to leave the marriage. In 1 Corinthians 7:15 he says *“Yet, if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.”*

The declaration that “the brother or sister is not under bondage” shows that there is no penalty attached to them as a result of their marriage ending. Their divorce is permissible, and therefore remarriage is allowed.

### **B. Remarriage is the Case of Immorality**

Jesus Himself clearly teaches what has come to be known as the “exception clause.” In Matthew 5:31,32 He stated *“It was said, ‘whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”*

Many in Jesus day allowed for divorce for “any cause” as seen in Matthew 19:3: *“Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?’”* It appears that Jesus decides to focus in only on the area of sexual faithfulness in his reply in verses 4–6: *“And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ ‘So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’”*

He concludes his answer in verse 9: *“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”*

As in Matthew 5, here in Matthew 19 Jesus again states the “exception” to the rule. It is important to understand that the exception clause governs both the divorce and, consequently, the right to remarriage. Where the divorce is permitted, or sanctioned by God, remarriage is also allowed. In cases where the divorce is not sanctioned by God, remarriage constitutes adultery.

## **Pastoral Considerations**

The issues surrounding marriage, divorce, and remarriage are increasingly part of pastoral ministry today. As Elders we desire to please God and at the same time be loving, sensitive shepherds who care well for our people. The following guidelines are intended to chart the path we wish to walk.

1. We will courageously and lovingly hold to the biblical view of marriage. We also commit ourselves to prepare those entering into marriage to do so with godly dedication to fulfill the stipulations of the marriage covenant.
2. We will counsel those whose marriages are in jeopardy to pursue a biblical course, act in obedience, repent of their sinful behavior, and humble themselves before their spouse.
3. We will work with those whose marriage covenants have been broken to pursue renewal of the covenant and restoration of the marriage.
4. In situations of marital infidelity, where the marriage covenant has been broken so consistently and thoroughly as to be irreparable, we will be available as needed to provide counsel and advice as the marriage moves towards divorce.
5. In the case of those who have divorced without God's sanction, or whose remarriage constitutes adultery, we will seek to bring them to repentance. Where true repentance is granted by God, we will forgive and offer the full fellowship of the Body. We do not believe that divorce is the unpardonable sin, and where there is evidence of true repentance it will be met with the grace of forgiveness.

## **Policy Administration**

It is the intention of the Elder Team to uphold the teaching of Scripture and apply it honorably to the situations that arise in the lives of people. Our first responsibility is to our Lord.

We also understand that issues pertaining to marriage and divorce are among the most painful things people face. We desire to be good shepherds of the flock of God, and retain the right to consider each case on its own merits, carefully bringing the relevant biblical texts to bear on the matter in order to honor God and minister to people in the best way.

## **Statement of Grace Baptist Church's Belief on Human Sexuality**

We believe that legitimate sexual relations are exercised solely within marriage. Hence, sexual activities, such as, but not limited to, adultery, fornication, incest, homosexuality, pedophilia and bestiality are inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible and the Church. Further, lascivious behavior, the creation and/or viewing of pornography, and efforts to alter one's gender, are incompatible with the biblical witness.

Marriage has been ordained by God and is a covenant relationship entered into before the face of God. The only marriage which Grace Baptist Church recognizes is the legal union of one man and one woman in which such union is a lifetime commitment.

Every minister, board member, and employee shall affirm their agreement with this understanding of human sexuality and shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent there with.