

**The Grace Covenant Church Elders
have adopted the following position:
position regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage.**

I. A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MARRIAGE

A. Marriage is a *Divine Institution*.

Contrary to some contemporary opinion, marriage is not a human institution that has evolved over the millennia to meet the needs of society. If it were no more than that, then conceivably it could be discarded when it is deemed no longer to be meeting those needs. Rather marriage is God's idea, and human history begins with the Lord Himself presiding over the first wedding. (Genesis 2:18-25)

B. Marriage is to be regulated by *Divine Instructions*.

Since God made marriage, it stands to reason that it must be regulated by His commands. In marriage, both husband and wife stand beneath the authority of the Lord. *Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. (Psalm 127:1)*

C. Marriage is a *Divine Illustration*

In both Old and New Testaments, marriage is used as the supreme illustration of the love relationship that God established with His people. Israel is spoken of as the wife of Jehovah (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:8; Hosea 2:19-20). The Church is called the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-32). It can be said that the Christian marriage is sort of a "pageant" in which the husband takes the part of the Lord Jesus, lovingly laying down his life, understanding, and leading his wife as Christ does the Church; and the wife plays the role of the believer, loving and submitting to her husband as the Christian does to the Lord. Thus, Christian marriage should be an object lesson in which others can see something of the divine-human relationship reflected.

D. Marriage is a *Covenant*.

From the earliest chapters of the Bible, the idea of covenant is the framework by which man's relationship to God is to be understood, and which also regulates the lives of God's people. A covenant is an agreement between two parties, based upon mutual promises and solemnly binding obligations. It is like a contract, with the additional idea that it establishes personal relationships. God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants is summarized in the statement, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." Marriage is called a covenant (Mal. 2:14), the most intimate of all human covenants. The key ingredient in a covenant is faithfulness, being committed irreversibly to the fulfillment of the covenant obligations. The most important factor in the marriage covenant is not romance, it is faithfulness to the covenant vows, even if the romance flickers.

**E. Marriage is a *Whole-Person Commitment* -
100% & 100%.**

God meant marriage to be the total commitment of a man and woman to each other. It is not two solo performances, but a duet. In marriage, two people give themselves unreservedly to each other (Genesis 2:25; 1 Cor. 7:3,4). This means that one's giving of oneself to the other is not contingent upon the performance of the other. Neither is it based upon one partner's realized expectations of another.

**F. What God has joined together let no man separate,
declared our Lord (Matt. 19:6).**

Till death do us part is not carry-over from old fashioned romanticism but a sober Reflection of God's intention regarding marriage (Rom 7:2,3; 1 Cor. 7:39).

G. Marriage is the divinely planned unit for the building of Society.

Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament monogamous marriage is cited as God's planned unit for the perpetuation and prosperity of humankind through families (Gen. 1:26-28; Matt. 19:4ff). As such, civil government has a biblical interest and a right to administrate marriage. While couples are encouraged to enter into the covenant of marriage under the authority of the church, the church nevertheless honors civil marriage. Those who come to Christ not having been married in the church do not need to remarry although they may desire to have their marriage blessed by the church. The church is not, however, bound to sanction civil divorce if the divorce is secured for an unbiblical reason (see below).

What's more, individuals who are not divorced according to civil law are married. Undivorced, separated brothers and sisters are NOT recognized as eligible in the eyes of the church to initiate or pursue other courting relationships until a divorce has been secured.

II. THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON DIVORCE

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

B. 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; Matt. 19:7,8). To say that divorce is always the result of sin is not to say, however, that all divorce is itself a sin. It may be the only way to deal with the sinfulness of the other party, which has disrupted the marriage relationship.

C. There are two conditions under which divorce is biblically permissible.

Since divorce is a sinful distortion of God's intention for marriage, it is an alternative of last recourse, to be avoided whenever possible. However, Scripture does teach that there are two circumstances in which divorce is permitted (though never required):

1. In the case of sexual unfaithfulness (Matt. 19:9).
2. In the case of desertion of a believing partner by an unbelieving spouse (I Cor. 7:15, 16)

D. Divorce carries with it consequences and complications.

Divorce because it is a violation of 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, even the sins of sexual infidelity and unjustified divorce (I Peter 2:24; 1 Cor. 2:13)

Forgiveness, however, does not remove the temporal consequences of our sins, or the pain and grief involved in the death of a relationship. Divorced singles, single parent families, remarriage and the problems of "blended" families are part of the consequences of God's intention being thwarted. The church is to minister to individuals and families suffering these consequences and to seek to help them respond with maturity to their problems.

E. Reconciliation is to be preferred to divorce.

While divorce is permitted, it is never commanded. Forgiveness and reconciliation are always to be preferred (I Cor. 7: 10, 11).

III. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT REMARRIAGE

A. Remarriage is permitted where the former spouse is deceased (Rom 7:2; 7:39; 1 Cor. 7:39).

B. Where a divorce occurred prior to conversion, remarriage may be permitted.

If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold new things are come (2 Cor. 5:17). When one becomes a Christian, all sin is forgiven and all condemnation removed (Rom. 8:1).

If the former marriage partner has also become a Christian, remarriage to that partner should be sought. 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 (2 Cor. 6:14).

Even though remarriage is allowable biblically, there may be consequences from past sins that continue, or destructive patterns from the old life that can carry into new relationships. Thus, a new marriage should be entered into with due thoughtfulness and with the counsel of mature Christians.

C. Where a divorce has occurred on Scriptural grounds the offended party is free to remarry.

A person who has been divorced because of infidelity of a marriage partner or desertion by an unbelieving partner, is free to remarry (1 Cor. 7:15).

D. What about desertion by a "Christian" 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 Christian. Such a situation ideally should involve the church in the steps of disciplinary action outlined in Matthew 18. A Christian who decides to walk out of a marriage without biblical cause is in violation of Scripture. Such a person who refuses the counsel and admonition of the elders and persists in following the course of disobedience ultimately is to be dealt with as though he/she is an unbeliever (Matt. 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 fall under the provision of 1 Corinthians 7:15.

E. Where a former spouse has remarried, remarriage is permitted for the other person.

Regardless of the reasons for the divorce itself, if one of the partners has remarried, the union is permanently broken and reconciliation is impossible and thus the remaining partner is free to remarry.

F. Scripture does not absolutely forbid remarriage of a person who has caused a non-biblical divorce.

Where there has been conversion (in the case of a person who was not a Christian when the divorce occurred) or the demonstration of genuine and heartfelt repentance (in the case of one who was a Christian at the time of the divorce), remarriage may be permitted for the offending party if (1) the former spouse has remarried or (2) the former partner refuses reconciliation (1 Cor. 7:15).

IV. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A. Is there ever a totally innocent party in marital discord or divorce?

No one is ever free from sinful conduct or attitudes, so in this sense there is no "innocent party." However, there are some sins that nullify the marriage covenant, and some which, though they may be serious, do not. In any case of marital discord, both partners need to understand how they personally contributed to the conflict.

B. Will divorced persons be allowed to participate in ministry opportunities in the church?

Spiritual, psychological and relational maturity are primary qualifications for service opportunities. Divorce would be considered only one part of a much broader evaluation of a person's suitability for ministry. Divorce does not necessarily preclude serving. A primary consideration must be the reputation and integrity that the individual has in the Body of Christ and the community (I Tim. 3:2, 7; Titus 1:6).

C. What if there has been no sexual unfaithfulness in a Christian marriage, but two Christians decide to dissolve their marriage because they are incompatible?

The Bible does not recognize incompatibility as grounds for divorce. Reconciliation must be achieved and every means possible should be considered, including individual and/or marriage counseling. If Christ is on the throne of two human hearts, conflict will ease. Jesus does not fight with Himself.

D. A frequent reason given for seeking a divorce is that the original marriage was a mistake.

The couple believes that they got married for the wrong reasons and are asking why they should perpetuate a mistake.

God's promise is that He is able to cause all things to work together for good, even our human mistakes (Rom. 8:28). The Bible does not recognize a "mistake" as grounds for divorce. A deliberate knowledgeable violation of God's revealed will for marriage is never an appropriate response to a mistake made earlier in life. "Two wrongs do not make a right."

E. What if a couple is separated or divorced and both desire to have sexual intimacy with each other?

Sexual intimacy is the privilege of a marriage relationship. If the couple is already divorced, such intimacy would be classed as fornication. If the couple is not actually divorced, then sexual intimacy might be appropriate (I Cor. 7:4-7). However, serious consideration should be given by each partner as to his or her personal motivation in the relationship. One of the considerations a couple must have is their reputation with their children and friends.

V. OUR RESPONSE TO REMARRIAGE

Given God's inexhaustible capacity to forgive human sin and restore broken lives, each case of divorce and remarriage has to be dealt with on an individual basis.

The remarriage of believers may not be approved when:

- A. Divorce is being used as a vehicle to seek a different mate. Such pre-intent makes divorce adulterous.**
- B. There is no evidence of repentance and brokenness over the circumstances that caused the divorce.**
- C. Restoration of the original marriage remains a viable option.**

(Adapted from Fresh Start Divorce Recovery, and used with permission of authors: Dr. Robert Burns and Dr. Thomas Whiteman)