

Marriage, Separation, Divorce and Remarriage

A Statement by the Elders and Pastors of Grace Church

INTRODUCTION

God Himself instituted marriage (Genesis 2:23,24) and planned it for the fulfillment and joy of humanity (Song of Solomon, Proverbs 18:22; 19:14). Unfortunately, what brings great joy can also bring great sorrow. God gives specific counsel not only for building a godly, happy marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33) but also for dealing with marital breakdown.

In this brochure we, the Elders and Pastors of Grace Church, have prayerfully and cautiously attempted to summarize biblical principles in such a way as to bring clarity and hope. Since no two situations are exactly alike, we will also seek to make available godly counselors to assist in applying these principles. It is our prayer that this will make God's will clearer to you and give you hope in what may be a difficult and confusing season of your life.

MARRIAGE

In God's Word, we read that marriage is the first institution that God ordained. He created and established marriage and intended it to be a heterosexual, monogamous, lifelong commitment for two individuals. His plan is for a Christian to marry another like-minded follower of Christ. (2 Corinthians 6:14-15)

Marriage is sacred in God's sight. In His love for us, He designed marriage to be "as long as the two shall live." In Jesus' words, "What God has joined together, let no man separate." (Matthew 19:4-6, Genesis 1:27-28; 2:23-24; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians. 7:10-11)

SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

When difficulties arise, a couple should make every effort to work through and resolve them in order to save their marriage. "Irreconcilable differences" or "incompatibility" are not biblical reasons for ending a marriage.

While we read in Malachi 2:16 that "*God hates divorce*," we recognize that His heart also breaks when He sees people wounded by the sin of others against them. Therefore, there are two circumstances of grievous sin that merit His permission to consider divorce.

The first such circumstance is when one of the marriage partners commits adultery or marital unfaithfulness. This can include extramarital sexual relations, homosexual relations, and incestuous relationships. Throughout the Old and the New Testaments, God always sees adultery as defiling a marriage and as grounds for ending it. It is important to note that in these cases, the offended party has a choice: to divorce legitimately on biblical grounds OR to remain in the marriage. (Matthew 5:31-32)

The second circumstance that may lead to divorce is when a believer is married to an unbeliever who decides to abandon their partner or to physically leave the marriage. In this situation, a believer can decide to legitimately and biblically claim an end to their marriage, seek a divorce and then remarry. (1 Corinthians 7:15)

When neither of these two circumstances is present, and yet other dynamics exist, there are situations where separation might be necessary. A time of separation can deflate the pressure in an intense marital situation and provide opportunity for both partners to examine the issues, seek counsel, and work on areas that need attention. Before taking this potentially drastic step, fervent prayer and wise, biblical counsel are indispensable.

Separation certainly needs to be considered in situations involving the physical, sexual or emotional abuse of a spouse or child(ren). The safety and protection of the offended person(s) must be considered in these circumstances.

Times of separation should be determined on a case-by-case basis, be purposeful with the intent of reconciliation, be seen only as an "emergency room" response to a crisis situation, not be for an open-ended or indefinite period of time, not be an end in itself, and be suggested or recommended by a group of trusted, biblically-wise individuals.

RE-MARRIAGE

When one of the spouses in a marriage dies, Scripture tells us the surviving spouse is free to remarry. This would appear to hold true even if a couple divorced on unbiblical grounds.

When a person has divorced on biblical grounds (sexual immorality of the partner or desertion), the person that was offended has the legitimate freedom to remarry. As in any case, re-marriage should be entered into with wisdom, with another believer, with someone who is not guilty of adultery, and with someone who did not divorce for the express purpose of being remarried.

When a person has divorced on unbiblical grounds, they are actually still married in God's sight. If reconciliation is at all possible, the believer should make every attempt to make that happen. This will involve a period of patiently waiting, praying, and trusting the Lord for heart change. If the former spouse becomes involved in a sexual relationship with another person or the unbelieving spouse abandons any attempt at reconciliation over an extended period of time, then the conditions of Matthew 5 ("marital unfaithfulness") or 1 Corinthians 7 ("abandonment") may be considered factors and the believer could come to a place of sensing a freedom to remarry.

Note: If a person divorces without biblical grounds, and then remarries, they are committing adultery in God's eyes. At that point the commitment to the original marriage relationship would be dissolved, and the unmarried person would be free to remarry. Those individuals divorced on unbiblical grounds who have remarried should not abandon/leave their current marriage but rather should be faithful to their current partner and responsibly fulfill their new marriage vows. (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2,3; Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:11,12; 1 Timothy 5)

GOD'S GRACE

The complexity of divorce and remarriage in our day has touched many, many lives. Some have been victims who have been deeply wounded by the sin of a spouse they loved and trusted, while others have been the guilty party in bringing about that pain. At Grace Church we teach and fully embrace God's forgiveness, acceptance and grace. We are on a journey together, all sinners saved by grace. He is able to bring healing, forgiveness, cleansing; it has been said that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. Together we cling to the promise of 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Let this verse be true for us. It must be our sincere desire from this moment on to be obedient and honor God. If we've done something wrong, He is the One who knows our heart and truly perceives our sincerity as we confess our sin to Him.