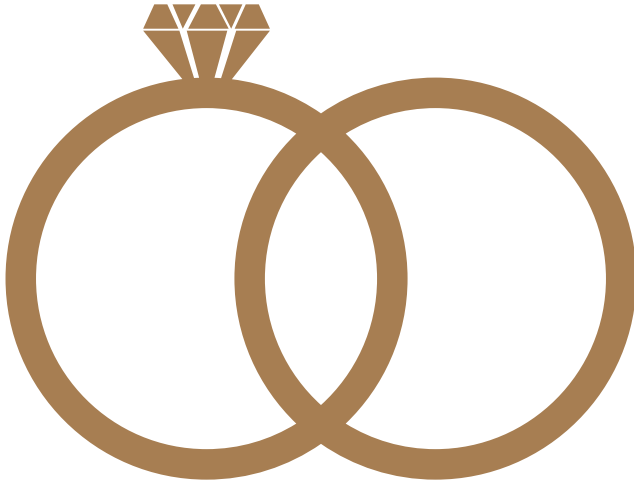


MARRIAGE, DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE



Grace Church Distinctives

GRACE CHURCH OF
TALLAHASSEE

WWW.GCOT.ORG

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

We live in a morally confused day and age. Our society attempts to blur the lines between right and wrong and seeks to normalize sin. This is especially apparent in the breakdown and moral confusion surrounding marriage in our culture. As a church that seeks to adorn the gospel of Christ Jesus, we desire to uphold God's standards in our lives. Since marriage is such a foundational aspect of human life, we must understand God's design for marriage and the complications caused by sin. By doing this, we seek to be a marriage-keeping church that upholds the divine standard for marriage.

God's Design for Marriage

God, the creator of the universe, ordained the institution of marriage from the beginning of the world (Gen. 2:18, 2:24). Marriage is the formation of a new union and new priorities that involve a man and woman leaving mother and father to be united to one another in a lifelong, monogamous relationship. It is a covenant relationship which should not be broken (Mal. 2:14). The New Testament also tells us that marriage is extremely important because it was designed by God to be a picture of Christ's relationship to the Church (Eph. 5:31-32). Thus, in Matthew 19:6, Jesus states, "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

The Nature of Divorce

Divorce separates that which God has joined. This is not part of God's design for marriages. It shatters the unity, intimacy, and love that marriage was designed for and obscures the picture of Christ and His Church. Therefore, believers should make every effort to avoid divorce. Nevertheless, Scripture does *permit* divorce in some cases. In Matthew 19:8, Jesus clearly states that divorce was permitted only as a result of the sinful hearts of the people

in breaking their marriage covenants. In summary, “The marriage covenant makes the two into one, but it is possible for sin to break them apart.”¹

Biblical Grounds for Divorce

Divorce is biblically permitted (though not required) when a spouse sins in a way that breaks the core of the marriage covenant (i.e., the one-flesh union).

One type of sin that fits this category is *sexual immorality*. This first situation is found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. The Greek word used by Jesus is *porneia* and “is the broadest term to describe sexual sin.”² This term encompasses many forms of sexual sins such as adultery, homosexuality, incest, transgenderism, and pornography.³ These actions break the marriage covenant. The innocent party should follow the steps of Matthew 18:10-20 and involve his or her church Elders in the process. Even in cases of severe sexual sin, a *genuinely* repentant heart and faith in Jesus’

¹ Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2017), 209.

² Andrew Naselli, “What the New Testament Teaches about Divorce and Remarriage,” in *The Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, (2019: 2-44), 15.

³ Naselli notes, *porneia* “can also refer to sexual sins that do not involve intercourse. For example, although the NT authors who use the word *porneia* obviously were not thinking of being addicted to internet pornography, by implication *porneia* can apply to that—similar to how ‘Do not get drunk with wine’ (Eph 5:18) also implies that you should not get drunk ‘with beer, whiskey, rum, vodka, or champagne’” (“What the New Testament Teaches about Divorce,” 15). This does not mean there is no distinction in severity though. While one act of physical adultery does allow the innocent spouse to seek a divorce, “For the consequences of non-physical (metaphorical) adultery [e.g., pornography] to be equal to the consequences of physical adultery, the non-physical adultery must be egregious. That is where qualifiers like repeated and unrepentant are fitting. For example, a church treats an angry man differently than a convicted murderer. A church is more likely to excommunicate an angry man only after multiple unrepentant expressions of anger” (Ibid., 18).

sacrifice for sin is met by the forgiveness of God and could result in the restoration of the marriage (Matt. 6:14, 18:21-35).

Another biblically permissible ground for divorce is in situations when a spouse abandons the marriage covenant. This is found in 1 Corinthians 7:15. If an unbelieving mate does not want to live with his or her believing spouse, the believing spouse should let the unbeliever seek a divorce. If the unbelieving partner permanently leaves the marriage relationship but is unwilling to file for divorce (to avoid monetary obligations etc.), the believing spouse “is not under bondage in such cases”⁴ and may have grounds to seek a divorce under the guidance of his or her church Elders (1 Cor. 7:15). In addition, there are other ways a spouse may abandon the marriage covenant that could warrant divorce. Such cases⁵ might include things like: (1) Abuse of one’s spouse, (2) Abuse of one’s children, (3) Extreme, prolonged verbal and relational cruelty, (4) Credible threats of serious physical harm or murder, (5) Incurable drug or alcohol addiction, (6) Incurable gambling addiction, (7) Incurable addiction to pornography.⁶ These cases would need the wisdom and discernment of the Elders to evaluate whether divorce is a legitimate option based on the specific situation.⁷ “When

⁴ “Paul implies that forbidding a deserted spouse to be divorced would be akin to trapping that spouse in slavery” (Wayne Grudem, “Grounds for Divorce: Why I now believe there are more than two,” in *Eikon*, Spring 2020: Vol. 2:1, pgs. 71-79, 74.)

⁵ In speaking of abandonment by an unbelieving spouse, Paul uses the phrase “in such cases” which indicates that there are “other kinds of situations [that] might destroy a marriage to the same extent that adultery or desertion would destroy it, and ... would trap a spouse in a slave-like condition that can only be remedied by divorce” (Grudem, “Grounds for Divorce,” 74). See also Ex. 21:10-11.

⁶ This list is from Grudem, “Grounds for Divorce,” 74-76.

⁷ As with the issue of non-physical adultery, these cases require extra care to sort out. For example, Newheiser points out that “There is a difference, though, between a man who raises his voice on occasion

dealing with tough cases, we should first ask, ‘What can be done to heal this marriage?’ before we ask, ‘Are there grounds for divorce?’”⁸

Believers who seek a divorce apart from the biblical grounds stated above are subject to church discipline for their open disobedience to God’s Word.

Remarriage

When a marriage ends in divorce, the couple is no longer married.⁹ The question is, “Is remarriage ever allowed?” If the divorce was a biblical divorce, then remarriage is allowed for the faithful partner. Remarriage would also be permitted in the case of a person who was divorced prior to conversion and has since repented of the sin (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Counsel should be sought from the Elders, however, to ensure there are no biblical obligations he or she must fulfill to the previous spouse.

If a divorce is not based on the biblical parameters above, remarriage to another person is usually not permitted. Instead, the offending party should repent. Upon true repentance, God’s grace will cleanse him or her. A truly repentant heart will then seek to restore the broken marriage as outlined in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. In some

and the man who physically beats up or berates his wife. Just as we wouldn’t encourage divorce in the case of every person who has a lustful thought or look (Matt. 5:28), we wouldn’t say that every spouse who has spoken hatefully in anger should be punished as a murderer (5:21–22) or has given grounds for divorce” (*Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 262).

⁸ Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 256.

⁹ “Jesus’s reply to the woman at the well illustrates this. He does not say, ‘You *have* five husbands.’ He says, ‘You are right in saying, ‘I *have* no husband’; for you *have had* five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true’ (John 4:17b–18, emphasis added).” Naselli, “What the New Testament Teaches about Divorce,” 20.

cases, this restoration may not be possible. For example, one member might already have remarried. In situations where restoration is not possible or advisable, the repentant partner *may* be free to remarry another. Situations such as this should be brought before the Elders in order to seek wisdom in defining any biblical obligations for those seeking remarriage.

In cases where a Christian obtained an unbiblical divorce and then an unbiblical remarriage, he or she should confess his or her sin to God. A person in this situation should remain in his or her current marriage relationship and realize that it is a valid marriage in God's eyes.

In any case, a Christian seeking remarriage must only marry "in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39, 2 Cor. 6:14). That is to say that he or she can only marry another believer.

The Church's Responsibility

The church should seek to help struggling marriages. At Grace Church, we want our people to help bear one another's burdens and to speak truth to one another. We encourage people in struggling marriages to ask for help. Get an Elder involved before things become more difficult to reconcile. Seek accountability and encouragement from other godly couples before trouble strikes.

The church must realize that divorce and unbiblical remarriage are not the unpardonable sin. Upon genuine repentance and efforts to restore a marriage relationship (if appropriate in the situation), the church *must* be willing to forgive as God does.

The church can and should provide wisdom in defining the biblical obligations of those seeking divorce or remarriage. These decisions should not be arbitrarily made but must be based on the truth of God's Word. Individuals facing

divorce or considering remarriage should seek counsel from the Elders to help determine how the Word of God applies to their particular situation. Our goal is to obey God's Word so that we bring no reproach upon the name of our Savior.

Finally, the church should seek to clarify the confusion caused by our culture which tends to muddy the moral waters around us. We should be a marriage-keeping body of believers that holds its members to the biblical standard. This is necessary if we are to keep the marriage relationship the God-honoring institution it was designed to be.