

Divorce and Remarriage

This document represents a statement of Grace Chapel regarding divorce and remarriage and how this issue relates to Grace Chapel church leadership. The Elders have prayerfully considered this critical issue facing the church, and this document is a reflection of their findings. Grace Chapel, its members, and leaders are expected to adhere to the principles and guidelines established in this document when addressing the divorce and remarriage issue within the context of the ministry of this church. The church understands that Christians may differ with their conclusions. However, this document constitutes Grace Chapel's biblical understanding of the issue.

Basic Findings:

- Marriage is God's institution (Genesis 1–2; Matthew 19:4–6).
- God hates divorce, but the Bible recognizes that divorce occurs (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:8–9).
- Biblically, divorce is permitted in cases of adultery and desertion (Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:12–15).
- Reconciliation should be the first choice for Christians (ex. Hosea 1–3).
- Remarriage is permitted in cases of a biblical divorce where there is no longer a chance for reconciliation, i.e. the spouse is deceased or remarried (1 Corinthians 7:15).
- Remarriage after a non-biblical divorce results in adultery, but once this marriage is entered into it is better to stay in that marriage than to dissolve it (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11; Deuteronomy 24:1–4).

Grace Chapel places a high value on the sanctity of marriage and will endeavor to support marriage and the family at every opportunity. The church also recognizes the pain and heartache that accompany divorce and seeks to support those going through the process.

Biblical Foundation:

Marriage is God's institution and plan for mankind (Genesis 1–2). Divorce in the Scripture is only permitted as an accommodation to man's sin for the protection of the innocent party. Since divorce is a concession to man's sin and not a part of God's original plan for marriage, all believers should have the same attitude toward divorce as does God (Malachi 2:16). In Matthew 19:5–9, Christ teaches that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin and is in violation of God's purpose for the unity of the marriage bond (cf. Genesis 2:24). Divorce was a concession for the "innocent party" due to the insensitivity of the other partner to God. This is biblically stated as the "hardness of heart" (Matthew 19:8). Dissolution meant that the innocent party no longer had to remain in a hopeless and intolerable situation (Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:12–15).

Biblically, Divorce is permitted in two cases:

- **Fornication** – The Greek word translated "adultery" in Matthew 5:32 is *porneia* probably better translated fornication, which seems to cover a wide area of sexual activity such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, prostitution, and incest (Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 5:1).
- **Desertion** – Cases where a non-believing mate leaves his or her believing spouse and initiates the divorce (1 Corinthians 7:12–15).

Divorce and Remarriage

It is essential to keep in mind that the Bible permits divorce in these limited circumstances but never commands divorce. The goal should be reconciliation as exemplified in Hosea 1–3, where the adulterous wife was forgiven and restored.

Salvation means that a person begins a new life. The believer is responsible to live up to what God has revealed about marriage and divorce from the point of his or her salvation. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, the believer has become a “new creature” when he or she accepts Christ as personal Savior. This does not mean the Christian immediately erases painful memories, bad habits, or the underlying causes for past marital problems, but that he or she begins a process of transformation through the Holy Spirit and the Word. A sign of saving faith will be receptivity and a willingness to obey what Christ has revealed about marriage and divorce through the Word. The Apostle Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:20, 27 is that a believer is to see every circumstance that he or she is in when he or she becomes a believer as from God. If the person becomes a believer while married, he or she is not to seek a divorce (except on the grounds given in Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:12–16).

Remarriage after divorce:

- **Divorce based on biblical grounds**
 - Remarriage is permitted for the innocent party when the divorce was on biblical grounds, and there is no possibility of reconciliation, i.e. spousal remarriage or death.
 - The Old Testament pattern allowed for remarriage after the divorce.
 - The New Testament allows for remarriage after a biblically based divorce (1 Corinthians 7:15). However, forgiveness and reconciliation should be pursued as the first choice (Ephesians 4:32).
- **Divorce based on non-biblical grounds**
 - The believer is exhorted to either seek reconciliation or remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11).
 - If the innocent party (innocent according to Matthew 5:32 and 1 Corinthians 7:15) in a divorce is seeking remarriage, it is preferable that he/she wait until the spouse is deceased or has remarried in order to not preclude any possibility of reconciliation.
 - When one party remarries after a divorce based on non-biblical grounds, that person commits adultery because God has not recognized the validity of the divorce (Matthew 5:32, Mark 10:11). Since the remarried partner has “committed adultery,” the marriage bond is now broken and the remaining partner is free to remarry since reconciliation is no longer possible.

The Bible gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12). However, if an individual has entered into a second marriage, they should remain in that marriage (Deuteronomy 24: 1–4).

In cases where divorce took place on non-biblical grounds and where the guilty party repents, the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. It is assumed that the repentant party will endeavor to restore the marriage whenever possible as a sign of true repentance. A true sign of repentance would be a desire to stay unmarried or seek reconciliation (1 Corinthians 7:11).

Divorce and Remarriage

Believers who pursue divorce on non-biblical grounds are subject to Church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God. The one who obtains a divorce on non-biblical grounds and remarries commits adultery (Matthew 5:32, Mark 10:11, 12). That person is subject to the steps of Church discipline in love for the purpose of restoration as outlined in Matthew 18:15–17 and illustrated in 1 Corinthians 5:1–13.

In summary, the Bible presents God's ideal for marriage. It is a value and goal of Grace Chapel to uphold the sanctity of marriage and the family as the basic, necessary human institution ordained by God (Genesis 1–2; Ephesians 5). God intends for the commitment of marriage to be life-long and its purity to be faithfully preserved. The inevitable tensions and differences between spouses arising from the “Fall” and from individual temperaments should be viewed as opportunities for mutual love and growth (Romans 8:28–29).

Leadership: Divorce and Remarriage

Church leadership in general:

The Church has a responsibility to uphold the biblical ideal of marriage, especially as exemplified by its leadership. In cases where there has been a divorce in a person's past, the Church has an obligation to restrict, for a period of time, the person's involvement in leadership until it can be proven that the present marriage exemplifies Christ's relationship to His Church, and the person's spiritual maturity can be demonstrated (Ephesians 5:22–33). It is especially important, in cases where there has been a divorce in a person's past, that there be a period of careful observation to see that devotion and sacrificial love characterize the present marriage.

Elder/Deacon leadership:

The leadership of Grace Chapel has reviewed the Scriptures and have concluded that the statement “husband of one wife” also translated “one woman man,” does not preclude a divorced man from serving as an Elder or a divorced man or woman serving as a Deacon. 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6 set the marital qualification for leadership within the Church. The phrase “the husband of one wife” does not mean that a person cannot have had a divorce in his past.

While divorce does not preclude a person biblically from serving in the role of church leadership, to set an example and model for the sanctity of marriage our preference will be to seek individuals who have not been divorced since becoming a Christian.

Given our cultural bias, we tend to emphasize this qualification over the others, but note this qualification is equal among the twenty qualifications given in Scripture that deal with the present spiritual maturity of an individual who desires to pursue the office of Elder or Deacon (1 Timothy and Titus). Each requires serious consideration.

Divorce and Remarriage

Listed below are reasons why we believe Paul was not referring to divorce and remarriage in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6:

1. The Greek phrase can be translated “one woman man” as well as “husband of one wife.” The emphasis here is on “one” rather than the term denoting the persons. The same type of construction is used of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9 where it clearly speaks of marital fidelity rather than the number of marriages (cf. 1 Timothy 5:14).
2. Context is the single most determinative factor in any interpretation (because words take their meaning from the way they are used in relation to other words). The context of this requirement for Church leadership contains only references to present moral character and capability, none to past events or social status.
3. If Paul wanted to eliminate anyone who had been divorced from consideration for Church leadership, he could have used one of many Greek constructions to clearly stipulate that requirement. He could have said “must never have been married,” “must not have been divorced,” or could have even simply added a perfect tense verb to say, “having had only one wife.”
4. The translation “husband of one wife” would only make sense if it were prohibiting polygamy, because Scripture would not use that terminology to refer to previous marriages. Even those men who have been remarried have only one wife at the present time. Their previous partners are not their wives anymore, nor would they be called husbands to those other women.
5. The phrase “husband of one wife” refers to the man’s sexual fidelity in his present relationship. By sexual fidelity it is meant that the man is committed to his wife in his heart, mind, and actions. Many men have been married to only one woman, but have not been a “one-woman” man.
6. If we were to accept the translation “husband of one wife” and as a reference to marital status, then there would be just as much of a textual case for the idea the Elders and Deacons could not be single or remarried after the death of a spouse.
7. Given the cultural situation in the Greek cities, it would have been difficult for Titus to appoint a plurality of Elders if Paul had eliminated anyone who had been divorced before they became Christians. It seems quite probable that many (or most?) of the candidates for Elder and Deacon in the early Gentile Churches would have had divorce in their pre-salvation past. Would not Paul have been clearer in his language if he wanted to exclude all of them from service?

The leadership of Grace Chapel has sought a position that is consistent with the teaching of God’s Word. Our position seeks to not capitulate to the world’s understanding, but rather is carefully crafted by prayer and Spirit-led study of the Scriptures.