

## Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Marriage and family are fundamental in the Body of Christ, and for that reason every Christian should know what a biblical marriage is, why God instituted it and how He designed it to function. At Cornerstone we are sensitive to the pains of divorce and how it deeply impacts the individuals involved as well as their children. Our prayer is to love with a sincere heart through the truth of God's word. With this information we desire to help the church avoid the tragedy of divorce, seek reconciliation when possible, and if necessary work through divorce in a Biblical manner. In light of our current culture we felt the need to provide a clear summary of Bible doctrine and church practice to help guide this Church to the glory of God.

### What is Marriage?

1. God designed marriage as a lifelong covenant relationship<sup>1</sup> between a man and woman for the purposes of mutual companionship,<sup>2</sup> bearing children,<sup>3</sup> marital satisfaction,<sup>4</sup> and to display the nature of the relationship between God and His people.<sup>5</sup> In marriage, one is “leaving” primary bonds of mother and father and permanently “cleaving” to a husband or wife. Marriage is enacted by a vow to this effect and its consummation, sexual union; in this way makes the couple “one flesh.”<sup>6</sup> Every marriage is permanently binding under God's authority and within the context of the community of faith held accountable through the Church.<sup>7</sup>

### Marriage to a Non-believer

2. God's Word commands that a believer must not marry a non-believer.<sup>8</sup> For this reason a believer also must not date a non-believer. However, God clearly regards an already existing marriage between a believer and a non-believer to be valid, and the believer must not leave or force the non-believer to leave, if they (the unbeliever) agrees to live with them under the values and principles of the Scripture (see point 4 and following).<sup>9</sup> Any current marriage is binding.

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<sup>1</sup> Corinthians 7:39; Malachi 2:14

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 5:18-19; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:22-23

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 2:18-24; also note how in the O.T. and New Testament a person is considered married not by sexual union but betrothal and all rights and responsibilities are taken upon with betrothal not sexual intercourse.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:13-32; 18:15-19:12; 1 Cor. 7

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14-15

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:12-13; 1 Peter 3:1-2

Widows: "... 'till death do us part"

3. Death breaks the marriage bond; therefore, a widow or widower is permitted to remarry a believer.<sup>10</sup>

To Those Who Would Betray Husband or Wife

4. To betray a husband or wife by desertion (abandon) or adultery is abhorrent to God, because God Himself is witness to the marriage vow.<sup>11</sup>
  - a. "Incompatibility," "falling out of love," or "things not working out," are never grounds for a Christian to divorce.
  - b. Actions leading to divorce is equally treacherous to children. Due to the severe consequences of divorce to children, and God's clear concern for their welfare, their consideration alone should encourage every possible prevention of divorce and every avoidance of actions which lead to divorce.<sup>12</sup>
  - c. It must be stated that forgiveness and total restoration of fellowship with the Lord and the church are always available to the genuine believer.<sup>13</sup> For those who abandon a spouse or commit adultery as a believer, this forgiveness does not bring permission to remarry as long as the offended spouse is living.<sup>14</sup>

When is Divorce and Remarriage Permitted?

5. Divorce and remarriage are permitted when one's spouse abandons the relationship or commits adultery. (Please read entire document for detailed explanation)
  - a. Remarriage is permitted without sin for anyone who is properly divorced, meaning for biblical causes.<sup>15</sup> Under normal circumstances, the number of times an individual has been married does not alter this principle.
  - b. In ancient Israel, it was a common misunderstanding of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 that divorce was allowed simply because something was displeasing or "indecent" about one's spouse.<sup>16</sup> Jesus corrects this misunderstanding by bringing the listener

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 1 Timothy 5:14

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:18; Proverbs 2:16-18; Malachi 2:14-16; 3:5; Hebrews 13:4

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Psalms 127:3; Proverbs 14:26; Matthew 18:1-10; Mark 9:42-48; Luke 17:1-2

<sup>13</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:5-8; 1 John 1:9; 2:1

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Romans 7:2-3

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15, 27-28

<sup>16</sup> Deuteronomy 24:1-4 The issue in Deuteronomy 24 was not sexual adultery which was already addressed in Deut.

adultery.<sup>17</sup> The innocent spouse, although stigmatized,<sup>18</sup> is not guilty of adultery if he or she remarries. The phrases “except for the cause of unchastity” (Matthew 5:32) and “except for immorality” (Matthew 19:9) clarify that the offended spouse is permitted to divorce and remarry without sin.<sup>19</sup>

c. The apostle Paul addresses the cause by which divorce is permissible, abandonment by a non-believer.<sup>20</sup> If a non-believer deserts his or her marriage to a believer, the believer is not mandated (forced) to pursue reconciliation; the believer is “not under bondage,” which means “not under obligation” or “free to act” without respect for the former marriage (see point 2 and point 9-d). Note: if the spouse who is innocent as to adultery and desertion also contributed to the destruction of the marriage through sin, they must repent of this and make every effort to restore the marriage. However, the point here is that no one can control their spouse or the decisions they make, and no sin justifies adultery or desertion; therefore, if there is no response to appeals for reconciliation, one cannot be regarded guilty of a divorce caused by the acts of desertion or adultery by another.

d. Although discipleship may be necessary to address wounds and sinful behavior, nothing in the Body of Christ is withheld from one who is properly divorced. The only exception is that a man who is divorced might not be permitted to serve as an elder or deacon.<sup>21</sup>

### Even Then, Divorce is Not Required

6. While divorce is permissible for the biblical reasons of adultery and desertion, divorce is not required or automatic. God’s own relationship with His people, Israel, is described as a husband-wife relationship in which Israel is constantly unfaithful to her husband, the Lord God. There is a frequent reminder that it is within God’s right to “divorce” Israel, yet ultimately He will be reconciled to her.<sup>22</sup> Also Hosea’s marriage to Gomer is an example of an unfaithful wife being restored. This is a startling highlight of God’s plan, because restoration in the case of adultery is beyond normal expectations.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew 19:4ff; Mark 10:8-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:3

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 5:32 Note: “makes her commit adultery” translates a passive Greek verb.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 5:32; 19:9

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:15

<sup>21</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1-10, 12; Titus 1:-9 One might also note that in the O.T. due to the priest office and role, God did not allow a Levite to marry a divorced woman and hold priestly office (Lev. 21:7, 14) this was not due to “sin” but rather the display of his priestly office as holy, representing to the people what was standard versus non-standard.

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 50:; 54:6-7; Jerimiah 3:8

<sup>23</sup> Hosea 1:2; 3:1-3

## The Priority of Reconciliation

7. In every instance of separation and divorce, the priority is reconciliation. In every case, except those referred to in points 3, 5, 8, 9-c and, and 10, the divorced man or woman must remain unmarried or be reconciled to their spouse.<sup>24</sup> A believer must not abandon a marriage, and in every case in which one does leave, committing desertion or adultery, he or she is not permitted to remarry as long as the offended spouse is living (see point 4).

## Reconciliation After a Second Marriage

8. If one is divorced and a later marriage ends in death or divorce, an individual is not permitted to remarry any previous spouse.<sup>25</sup>

## When Must the Church Be Involved? The Instruction from Matthew 18:15-18

9. In The case of a failing marriage between two professing Christians where a husband or wife is involved in adultery or has perhaps abandoned the marriage, the biblical process according to Matthew 18:15-18 is as follows:

- a. Private confrontation in which the offending spouse is confronted by his or her own husband or wife.<sup>26</sup>
- b. If the offending spouse will not listen, repent, and be reconciled in the marriage, the one seeking reconciliation should bring one or two others from the church to confront them.<sup>27</sup>
- c. If the resistant spouse still will not listen, the problem must be submitted to the church leadership who will confront the offending spouse and restore the marriage, or determine an adamant refusal to be reconciled.<sup>28</sup> Such a refusal demonstrates a lack of repentance and faith. The church must regard the unrepentant man or woman “as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer,”<sup>29</sup> meaning a non-believer, since he or she has disregarded the marriage vow and shown contempt for the church.<sup>30</sup> *Note*, the purpose for church discipline is to seek reconciliation and restoration of fellowship both within the marriage and church. God’s desire

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 24:1-4 In essence this is speaking of “wife swapping”

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 18:15

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 18:16

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 18:17a

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 18:17b

<sup>30</sup> Also refer to 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 9-13

for reconciliation and restoration comes through clarity. Throughout Scripture we see God dealing with those who call themselves His people in this way. The expectation is that leadership deals with the situation with wisdom, discernment, patience, and persistence, keeping with the spirit of God's command.

- d. After reasonable attempts to reconcile an individual to the church and to the marriage, the believer who has been unjustly abandoned must then be regarded as “not under bondage” to the unrepentant spouse, since this offending spouse is now regarded as a non-believer who has deserted the marriage<sup>31</sup> (See point 5-c and 5-C Note). *Note 1:* Where the church leadership have determined biblical grounds for divorce (see point 9-c), there is no necessary waiting period imposed that would subject an innocent believer to the wickedness of an unrepentant spouse. This is the effect of the **imperative** command, “let him leave.”<sup>32</sup> *Note 2:* Where proper grounds for divorce have been established, the matter of who “files for divorce” is irrelevant.
- e. If during this process, in the case of desertion, the offending man or woman responds, thus showing evidence of repentance and faith, the church and the spouse are obligated to forgive and work to fully restore the marriage.<sup>33</sup> Church discipleship and counseling are strongly recommended. However, in the case of adultery, the sin itself destroys the marital bond and constitutes desertion. God likens adultery to marrying another.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the weight of obligation to reconcile does not exist; divorce is permitted and in some cases advised. Nevertheless, as noted in point 6, it is not required, automatic, or necessarily desired.

#### Are There Other Biblical Grounds For Divorce?

10. The process above may also be undertaken in some cases of other sins destructive to the marriage, or endangering of spouse or children, such as physical abuse, violence to children, or gross sexual perversion. These are not “additional grounds” for divorce or “loopholes” for easy divorce. Each case must be established through formal church discipline as acts of an unrepentant person endangering his or her family, thus leading to excommunication and constituting desertion.

#### What About Divorce Before Becoming a Christian?

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<sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:15

<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:15

<sup>33</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Matthew 6:14; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25; Luke 17:3; Ephesians 4:32

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:16

11. Remarriage is also possible where divorce has occurred before Christian conversion.<sup>35</sup> However, if the new believer is guilty of preconversion adultery or desertion, and the abandoned spouse is still unmarried and desires reconciliation, it is necessary for conversion to lead to reconciliation of that marriage. Therefore, if possible, a reasonable attempt at reconciliation should be made. If unsuccessful, the new believer is permitted to remarry.

#### What About Divorce Before Attending Cornerstone Baptist Church?

12. If an individual was divorced prior to attending Cornerstone Baptist Church, a conversation with a leader from Cornerstone is necessary for a mutual understanding of those circumstances. Guidance will be given based on a former Church's determination if it was of similar orientation, or in the absence of an evangelical church, based on what a biblical church would have determined with the information currently available. The guidelines above will be used in such a case.

#### Premarital Sex

13. Premarital sex is a presumptuous sin and is incompatible with Christian marriage preparation and sexual purity. Before a marriage can be performed in this case repentance and abstinence will be expected for at least six months or until the couple's wedding date if it is more than six months away. There is no biblical basis to regard premarital sex and/or pregnancy as grounds for marriage. In these cases, repentance, accountability, and discipleship are necessary before marriage.<sup>36</sup> If a couple is pregnant or has children outside of the marriage vows and wishes to be married, upon repentance, it would be best to perform the ceremony as soon as possible to bring the relationship into unity with God's ideal.

#### Cohabitation

14. Cohabitation is also sin because it is an arrangement that is not above reproach. Unrelated men and women are not permitted to live in the same dwelling even in the case of "platonic" relationships or for financial convenience.<sup>37</sup>

#### Premarital Counseling is Always Required

15. Before the wedding date all couples are required to take the full premarital counseling course of Cornerstone Baptist Church if they will be married by its pastor. This is as much a

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<sup>35</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>36</sup> 1 Timothy 5:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

<sup>37</sup> Philippians 2:15

requirement for multiple marriages as for first marriages. Premarital counseling has proven to dramatically reduce the incidence of divorce and is not optional. Couples who remain associated with Cornerstone Baptist Church should also receive one year of mentoring after their wedding. Premarital counseling from other churches is acceptable if approved by Cornerstone Baptist Church.