

FELLOWSHIP EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

# Marriage

## Our Position and Policy

1/21/2020

This document represents our understanding and interpretation of the biblical teachings on marriage, divorce and remarriage by the Elders and Pastors of Fellowship Church. It is also intended to be used as a guide in the handling of all such matters that arise in our body that are affected by the marriage, divorce, and remarriage of our members and those seeking membership.

# Fellowship Church – Our Position and Policy on Marriage

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## Church Position and Policy on Marriage

This paper is first and foremost about marriage – marriage the way God created it and intends it to be. In the book of Hebrews God says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all” (Heb 13:4). Although this is not the case in the culture in which we live, where the definition is becoming clouded and the value questioned, the elders and pastors of Fellowship Church believe it is crucial, as disciples of Christ, that we uphold the biblical values and standards of marriage. Within the biblical understanding of marriage God reveals to us much about Himself, about who we are, and about our relationships with Him and each other. Only within the biblical understanding of marriage can we understand the implications of divorce and remarriage. But this document is not only an attempt to uphold the true meaning of marriage; it is also a call for obedience and trust in God and His Word.

One of the responsibilities the New Testament assigns to elders and pastors is to “keep watch over the souls of those in their congregation as those who must give an account” (Heb. 13:17). This responsibility includes teaching against and correcting family attitudes and behaviors that are disruptive or destructive to the spiritual health of those in their congregation (Titus 1:11; 2 Tim 3:1-9; 1 Tim. 5:1 - 8; Titus 2: 1-8). There are few attitudes and behaviors that are more destructive to the spiritual health of family members (both adults and children) than those that lead to the violation and severance of a marriage covenant between a husband and a wife (Mal. 2:13 – 16). For this reason, the leadership of our church attempts to treat any behaviors or attitudes by our congregants that lead to the violation and/or severance of their marriage covenant with the same sensitivity, significance and redemptive grace that the Bible does.

Since the culture in which we live is trying to change the definition and purpose of marriage, the elders and pastors of Fellowship Church want to provide a resource for our congregation that brings together, in one document, the biblical teachings on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and the way we use them to guide our decisions regarding church membership, church service and church leadership. The purpose of this paper is threefold: 1) to clarify the significance the Bible attaches to marriage, divorce, and remarriage; 2) to outline how our church leaders use these teachings to guide them when shepherding congregants who face the reality or possibility of divorce or remarriage; and 3) to provide biblical guidance to those who are earnestly seeking to follow and serve God through their marital choices.

Divorce and remarriage are two of the most difficult issues any person, family, or church ever faces. We believe God offers us as believers the wisdom, grace, and strength that enables us to respond to these issues in ways that will bring both glory to Him and growth, healing, and reconciliation to the individuals, families and churches involved. To people currently making choices about marriage, divorce or remarriage, our goal is to help you be obedient to God. To people who have divorce in their recent past, our goal is to help you be fully restored. To people who have divorce in their distant past, our goal is to help you continue to grow and serve God in every way that He’s calling you to.

We begin our paper by reviewing the Biblical truths and scripture references concerning marriage. The second section reviews the Biblical truths and scripture references concerning divorce and remarriage. Based on the foundation of the first two sections, the third section outlines the principles we believe the Bible teaches and the ones we use in addressing all issues of marriage, divorce,

and remarriage in our congregation. The final sections are appendices that address some of the issues in greater depth and with further explanation.

## 1. The Biblical Significance of Marriage

We believe the Bible teaches the following truths about marriage:

- A. Marriage (including the idea of family) was and is God's idea, not man's. God defines what marriage is, not man. He created marriage at the same time he created man and woman and instituted it first and foremost for his own glory and honor (Mal. 2:15; Col. 3:17-19). He accomplishes this not by using marriage primarily to meet our needs, but to help us become more like His son Christ in our holiness and selflessness (Eph. 5:25-31; 1 Peter 3:1-7).
- B. God instituted marriage to be a lifelong covenantal relationship between Himself and two willing adults, one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39; Eph. 5:31). This excludes any marriage between people of the same sex. The Bible views a marriage covenant as more than a legal contract between two people. It views it as an unconditional commitment by a man and woman to serve God through the fulfillment of their biblical responsibilities as husband and wife until death or God releases them from this commitment (Matt. 19:4-6).
- C. When a man and woman enter a marriage covenant with God and each other they become one-flesh, joined together by God in both a spiritual and physical union (Matt. 19:4-6, Eph. 5:28-31). The one-flesh bond between a husband and wife is considered sacred by God who gives strong prohibitions against husbands and wives doing anything to violate or dissolve it (Mal. 2:15, Matt. 19:6). (See Attachment "A" for further explanation of what the Bible says about the one-flesh bond in marriage).
- D. Men and women are forbidden to be married to more than one person at a time (1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 3:2 & 12). This violates the one-flesh bond of marriage.
- E. In marriage both a husband and wife have the overarching purpose and responsibility to promote the spiritual growth and well-being of the other by following Christ's example of loving their partner with grace, humility, persistence, and sacrifice (Eph. 5:25 -26; 1 Peter 3:1-5; 1 Cor. 7:12-14).
- F. Christians are forbidden to marry unbelievers (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-18).
- G. Christians who are married to unbelievers are commanded to stay married to them as long as the unbeliever still wants to live as husband and wife and as long as there exists no ground for a biblical divorce (1 Cor. 7:12-13).

- H. The covenantal relationship of marriage is recognized by our church when a man and woman voluntarily and publicly (with witnesses) form a marriage union with each other in a way that is sanctioned by the governing authorities where they reside (Gen. 2:24, Rom. 13:1-2). Biblically, this covenant is a commitment to both God and each other (Mal. 2:14) to faithfully fulfill all the biblical responsibilities of a husband or wife as long as they both live and are physically able. These responsibilities include but are not limited to:
1. Conjugal affection and intercourse (1 Cor. 7:1-5);
  2. Material support of each other (food, shelter, clothing – 1 Cor. 7:33-35; Eph. 5:28-29; 1 Tim. 5:8; Ex. 21:10-11);
  3. Marital fidelity (Matt. 19:9)
- I. The annulment of a marriage (reckoning it null and void and never to have existed) that was thought to be legal when originally constituted, is recognized by our church only in the rare instance it is legally sought and granted by one of the partners immediately upon the discovery of proof of gross deceit or misrepresentation committed by the other partner prior to their marriage.
- J. The covenantal relationship of marriage and all the marital responsibilities associated with it are ended when the covenant is terminated by either or two occurrences:
1. The death of one of the marriage partners (1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2); or
  2. One or both partners complete the legal steps to terminate the marriage (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11, 15).
- (Legal termination of a marriage does not, however, end the ongoing responsibilities the divorced partners have to treat each other with biblical respect, to fulfill all their legal obligations to each other according to the terms of their divorce settlement, and to meet all of the moral and legal obligations they have to contribute to the support and parenting of their children).

## 2. The Biblical Significance of Divorce and Remarriage

We believe the Bible teaches the following truths about divorce and remarriage:

- A. The divorce/dissolution of a marriage is something that God detests (Mal. 2:16). Divorce is totally incongruent with the permanent nature of the one-flesh bond marriage creates between a man and a woman (Mark 10:6-9). See Appendix A and C.
- B. The cause of a divorce/dissolution of a marriage is always attributable to one or both partners persisting in a willful, unrepentant pattern of sin described by Jesus as “hardness of heart” (Matt. 19:8). See Appendix C.

- C. Every church has the responsibility to guard against “hardness of heart” (see 2B above) among its members and take swift corrective action with its members when it’s detected, especially when it disrupts (or threatens to disrupt) the health of its families or marriages (Hebrews 12:14-15; Titus 1:9-11). See our Church Discipline and Restoration Policy for a fuller discussion of our church’s policy on corrective church discipline.
- D. Married people are forbidden to initiate divorce/dissolution of their marriage without biblical ground. To do so exposes their own “hardness of heart”, violates their covenant with God and their partner, “separates what God has joined together” (severing the one-flesh bond with their partner), and makes them guilty of adultery if they remarry or have sexual relations with another person (Matt. 19:9; Mal. 2:16).
- E. The Bible grants only one permissible exception or ground for initiating divorce from one’s marriage partner – the violation of the one-flesh bond (see Appendix A) by one’s partner (Matt. 19:3-6). This exception permits, but does not require, the violated partner to be released from their marriage covenant (Matt. 19:7-9; 1 Cor. 7:15). The Bible identifies four acts that constitute a violation of the one-flesh bond in marriage:
1. Gross Immorality – sexual relations/activities with anyone besides one’s marriage partner – Matt. 19:9, Heb. 13:4, Matt. 5:32, Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18;
  2. Gross Abandonment – making choices that deny one’s marriage partner the conjugal (sexual) or cohabitational rights of marriage – Ex. 21:10-11; 1 Cor. 7:1-4, 15;
  3. Gross Abuse – intentionally causing (or threatening to cause) physical harm to one’s marriage partner or children – Ex. 21:10-11; Eph. 5:28-29; 1 Peter 3:7;
  4. Gross Neglect – refusing or neglecting to meet the basic physical needs or protect the physical well-being of one’s marriage partner or children (when it’s within their means) – 1 Tim. 5:8, Eph. 5:28-29, Ex. 21:10-11.

Each one of these constitutes a violation of the one-flesh bond and gives only the violated partner the biblical ground and prerogative (if they choose to exercise it) to terminate the marriage covenant and thus divorce their partner. See Appendix C for a fuller discussion of the biblical ground for divorce.

- F. Even when the biblical ground exists, the Bible forbids people from doing anything toward their marriage partner (including divorcing them) that is rooted in motives of revenge, retribution, or mere self-interest rather than biblical love (Rom. 12:14-21, Phil. 2:1-5). When the biblical ground exists, people should divorce only when they are doing it for biblical motives – 1) to bring the offending partner to repentance (with the hope and prayer that God uses the divorce to “bring their partner to repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, so that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Cor. 5:9-16; 2 Cor. 5:4-5; Jer. 3:6-14) and/or 2) to protect themselves and/or their children from physical injury by the offending partner (2 Thess. 3:6-15).

- G. Because the determination of whether someone truly has the biblical ground and motive to divorce one's partner requires biblical knowledge, spiritual discernment, and spiritual maturity, a person should not conclude they have the biblical ground or motive and proceed with a divorce without consulting with the pastors and elders of their church (1 Cor. 6:1-8; 1 Cor. 2:12-15; Heb. 5:14).
- H. Because separating from one's marriage partner for an extended period of time (choosing to live apart from them indefinitely without divorcing them) can easily lead to violations of the one-flesh bond (1 Cor. 7:10), it should not be viewed as a biblical alternative to divorce or as a benign remedy for marriage problems. Because of this, marital separations should only be utilized for short periods of time, by mutual consent of both partners, and under and supervision of a godly skilled counselor, to enhance the spiritual/marital health or growth of the couple (1 Cor. 7:5-6; Jer. 3:6-14). If the purpose of the separation is to protect oneself or one's children from physical harm and give one's marriage partner time to change violent or abusive behavior, more extended separations might be necessary (2 Thess. 3:6-15).
- I. People whose previous marriage(s) ended without them violating the one-flesh bond with their marriage partner are free to remarry a biblically eligible person\* (without it constituting adultery) if one of the following circumstances apply to them:
1. Their previous marriage(s) ended by their partner's death (which was unassisted by them) – Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39; 1 Tim. 5:14;
  2. Their previous marriage(s) ended by a divorce that they initiated with biblical ground and motive – Ex. 21:11; 1 Cor. 7:27-28 (see 2E and 2F above); or
  3. Their previous marriage(s) ended by a divorce that was initiated by their partner without biblical ground and without their encouragement – 1 Cor. 7:15; 27-28 (please see Appendix D for a fuller discussion of 1 Cor. 7)

*\*A biblically eligible person is someone who is a Christian (1 Cor. 7:39) and who did not violate the one-flesh bond in a previous marriage or who did not divorce a previous partner without biblical ground (Mark 10:11-12, Matt. 5:32).*

- J. Divorced people (whether they are remarried or not) who violated the one-flesh bond in their previous marriage(s) or who divorced their partner without biblical ground are called by God to fully repent of their "hard-heartedness" and seek reconciliation with Him and their former marriage partner(s), whether or not remarrying their former partner is possible. Forgiveness and reconciliation with God are always available to marriage violators who truly and wholeheartedly repent (although the privilege to biblically remarry or serve in certain spiritual leadership positions in the future may not be). The biblical reconciliation process for violators of the "one-flesh" bond in marriage requires the following steps of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10-11):

1. Full acknowledgement and acceptance of their responsibility for violating the “one-flesh” bond in their previous marriage(s);
  2. Wholehearted repentance of their sinful behaviors and attitudes in their previous marriage(s) (see Appendix B for a full discussion of biblical repentance);
  3. Finding the strength and wisdom from Christ to change these sinful behaviors and attitudes;
  4. Seeking forgiveness from their former partner(s) for all the sins they committed against them;
  5. Offering to repay, repair, or make restitution for all the damages their actions caused others;
  6. Entering into a process of reconciliation with their former partner(s) to the extent their former partner(s) is willing – even to the extent of remarriage with their most recent former partner (if neither is remarried since their divorce);
  7. Careful study and submission to what God teaches about remarriage after the divorce of a marriage in which they have violated the “one-flesh” bond
- K. People who divorce their partner and later want to remarry them are only free to do so (without it constituting adultery) if both of them have not been married to someone else during the intervening time (Jer. 3:1-3; Deut. 24:1-4).

### 3. Principles for Living Out These Teachings in Our Church Community

The teachings outlined in the previous pages reflect the gravity the Bible places on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The pastors and elders of our church seek to respond with this same sense of gravity to all issues concerning divorce and remarriage that arise in the life of our congregants. In doing so, our leaders also seek to work with our congregants with the same kind of patience (1 Thess. 5:15), gentleness (2 Tim. 2:25; Gal. 6:1), humility (Gal. 6:1-2; Phil. 2:3), and love (2 Thess. 3:14; Heb. 12:7-11) that the Bible requires of spiritual leaders. The Bible gives pastors and elders the responsibility to help congregants understand how and when biblical truths and principles apply to the kind of complex and interpersonal problems that divorce and remarriage entail (1 Cor. 6:1-8; Heb. 13:17). Our church leaders utilize the following principles, based on the biblical teachings summarized above, to guide and respond to our congregants on matters related to divorce and remarriage while following the biblical imperative to never counsel someone to seek a divorce from their lawfully wedded marriage partner (Matt. 19:6). We also seek God for wisdom to shepherd each of our congregants on a case by case basis considering the unique circumstances each finds themselves in. Above all else, we are committed to shepherding the hearts of each of our people toward experiencing and displaying the grace and righteousness of Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:17).

**A. Principles for responding to those in our church who violate the “one-flesh” bond in their marriage (thus creating for their partner the biblical ground for divorce):**

When we become aware of any of our congregants violating the “one-flesh” bond in their marriage we counsel them to immediately and fully cease what they’re doing, repent of their “hard-heartedness”, and seek reconciliation with God and their marriage partner(s). We offer them pastoral counseling to help them accomplish these. We teach them that the biblical reconciliation process for violators of the “one-flesh” bond in marriage requires the following steps of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10-11):

1. Full acknowledgement and acceptance of their responsibility for violating the “one-flesh” bond in their marriage.
2. Wholehearted repentance of their sinful behaviors and attitudes in their marriage (see also Appendix B for a full discussion of biblical repentance);
3. Finding the strength and wisdom from Christ to change these sinful behaviors and attitudes;
4. Seeking forgiveness from their marriage partner for all the sins they committed against them;
5. Offering to repay, repair, or make restitution for all the damages their actions caused others;
6. Entering into a process of reconciliation with their marriage partner, to the extent their partner is willing, toward the end of complete restoration of their marriage (understanding that although reconciliation with God is always available to marriage violators who truly and wholeheartedly repent, full reconciliation and restoration of their marriage relationship may not be);
7. Careful study and submission to what God teaches about remarriage after the divorce of a marriage in which they have violated the “one-flesh” bond (in preparation for the possibility their partner chooses to divorce them).

**B. Principles for responding to those in our church who are considering or seeking a divorce:**

**1. When biblical ground does not exist**

We counsel our congregants not to seek a divorce when the biblical ground and motive do not exist. We encourage them to study the Scriptures to understand the significance of their marriage covenant with God and their partner. We implore them to seek help from the Lord and godly counselors to forgive and love their partner biblically and find all the help they can to address the problems/difficulties they are facing in their marriage. We warn them about the consequences of divorce (for both them and their children) including the spiritual consequences they will face

if they choose to divorce their partner without biblical ground or motives. This could likely include church disciplinary action (following the guidelines in our church's disciplinary policy paper) toward them if they proceed with divorcing their partner without biblical ground.

## 2. When the biblical ground does exist

We counsel our congregants to seek wisdom from God and our pastors and elders to determine whether their partner has truly violated the "one-flesh" bond of marriage before proceeding with divorce. Before proceeding we also ask them to work with our church leaders to decide if alternative interventions could be utilized to seek a change of heart and behavior in their partner (Matt. 18:15-17). We urge them to explore and consider all other options for addressing the marriage violations of their partner. We encourage them to examine their own heart, making sure they have biblical motives as well as biblical ground before proceeding with divorce action toward their partner. We warn them to fully understand and prepare for the consequences of divorce (for both them and their children) that are inevitable even when the divorce is initiated for biblical ground and motives. Under no condition do we recommend as a church that someone, even with biblical ground and motives, divorce their lawfully wedded marriage partner. We believe each person who finds him/herself in this situation (married to someone who has violated the "one-flesh" bond in their marriage) must bear the responsibility alone for discerning God's will and making the decision whether to divorce their partner or not. Even when biblical ground exists, divorce action (just like church disciplinary action) should only be taken as a redemptive act of love by the offended partner on behalf of the offending party (Jer. 3:6-14).

## C. Principles for responding to those in our church who are resisting a divorce:

We counsel our congregants to acknowledge responsibility, ask forgiveness, and seek reconciliation with God and their marriage partner for any sins they have committed in their marriage, especially any violations of their "one-flesh" bond (Matt. 5:23-24). We encourage them to ask their partner to reconsider their divorce action and to seek help from godly counselors to reconcile their marriage. We seek their permission to go to their partner on their behalf as peacemakers, to urge their partner to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and godly counselors about their decision to divorce. We warn their partner about the consequences of divorce, including the spiritual consequences they will face, if they choose to divorce without biblical ground or motives. We caution our congregants, as Paul does in 1 Cor. 7:15, not to try to coerce their partner to stay married to them against their will. We initiate church disciplinary action against their partner (following the

guidelines in our church's disciplinary policy paper) if they are one of our congregants who are initiating the divorce without biblical ground or motives.

**D. Principles for responding to those in our church who are recovering from a divorce:**

We urge our congregants to take all the steps necessary to recover fully (spiritually and emotionally) from their divorce experience (this includes all the steps in 2-J above if they did anything to violate the "one-flesh" bond in their previous marriage(s)). We counsel them to seek help from godly counselors and the resources in our community (i.e. Divorce Care) to fully explore, acknowledge, and repent of all they did to contribute to the break-up of their marriage. We encourage them to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God and their former partner(s) for any sins they have committed in their marriage(s), especially any violations of the "one-flesh" bond. We counsel those that are biblically free to remarry to avoid all interactions with others that could lead to romantic entanglements for at least two years and until all possibility of reconciliation with their most recent former marriage partner no longer exists.

**E. Principles for responding to those in our church who are already divorced and . . .**

**1. Seeking remarriage to a new partner**

Before considering remarriage to another person, we counsel our divorced congregants to study what the Bible teaches about marriage, divorce, and remarriage to determine if they are biblically free to remarry without it constituting adultery (see Appendix D).

We counsel those who are biblically free to remarry to avoid all interactions with others that could lead to romantic entanglements for at least two years and until all possibility of reconciliation with their most recent former marriage partner no longer exists. If they choose to remarry, we urge them to follow the guidelines in 1 Cor. 7:39 and 2 Cor. 6:14-18, taking care that both they and anyone they choose as a future marriage partner meet the biblical qualifications for marriage partners.

If they are not biblically free to remarry (see Appendix D) we counsel them to refrain from dating and remarriage. If they proceed to do either despite our warning, we may impose some restrictions on their participation in our church (See Appendix F). We inform them that we only permit and/or officiate the remarriages of divorced people in our church when they are biblically free to remarry (according to the

biblical teachings in this paper – see Appendix D) and when a minimum of two years has elapsed since their divorce. We generally do not permit or officiate over remarriages of divorced people in our church who violated the one-flesh bond in a previous marriage or who initiated divorce in a previous marriage without biblical ground.

## 2. Seeking Membership

We welcome into our membership divorced and/or remarried people who have dealt biblically with their own sinful behaviors and attitudes that contributed to the break-up of their previous marriage(s). Therefore, we ask everyone who is applying for membership to tell us about their previous marriage(s) and divorce(s) and their understanding of what their responsibility was for their marriage break-up(s). We seek to determine if they have done all they can to express genuine repentance and seek full reconciliation with God and their former partner(s). If they have not, we offer them guidance toward completing this process and require them to complete it before we welcome them into our membership.

Divorced people who violated the “one-flesh” bond in a previous marriage or who initiated divorce in a previous marriage without biblical ground, and who have done all they can to express genuine repentance and seek full reconciliation with God and their former partner(s), are permitted to be members of our church but may be restricted in our church from serving in some spiritual leadership positions such as elder or pastor (See Appendix F for a fuller discussion of this). The same is true for those who are married to a person who violated the “one-flesh” bond in a previous marriage or who initiated divorce in a previous marriage without biblical ground. They are permitted to be members of our church but may be restricted from serving in some spiritual leadership positions such as elder or pastor (1 Tim. 3:2, Luke 16:18).

## 3. Seeking teaching or leading positions

Anyone who wants to serve in a teaching or leading position at our church must first become a member. Anyone who is a member and not under any restrictions set by our elders is free to volunteer to serve in teaching or leading positions. Divorced and/or remarried members are not restricted from serving in these positions (including pastoral staff and elder positions), except as specified in 3E2 above and Appendix F, provided they meet all the qualifications that are needed for the position (i.e. knowledge, skills, spiritual maturity, experience, etc.).

## **Conclusion**

The elders and pastors of Fellowship Church intend for this paper to assist our congregants in understanding God's teaching on His institution of marriage. It is not meant to be used as a legalistic formula. However, we believe it captures the spirit and substance of scripture regarding how we are to relate to our spouses, our church community, and God. As we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of the marriage relationship and live in accordance with the Bible's teachings on these topics, we will come to know the heart of the Father who created the one-flesh bond.

## Appendix A

### Further Explanation of the “One Flesh” Bond in Marriage

The “one flesh” bond that exists between a husband and wife is explicitly mentioned numerous times in scriptural teachings about marriage. According to the bible, the “one flesh” bond is the physical, emotional, and spiritual union that is created between two people who choose to become sexually intimate with each other (Gen. 2:24, 1 Cor. 6:16). It is unlike the bond that exists in any other kind of human relationship. God attaches great significance and responsibility to it (Mal. 2:15) and intends it to be reserved exclusively for two people who have covenanted together with Him to be life-long marriage partners. This bond comes with an obligation to nurture, protect, and care for the person with whom we are “one-bonded” as Christ does the church (Eph. 5:25) and as we would our own body (Eph. 5:28 & 29). The following truths about the “one flesh” bond in marriage are asserted in the bible:

- A. It is a bond that God creates between two people when they consummate their marriage covenant with sexual intercourse (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6). It carries with it privileges and responsibilities that supersede in extent, duration, and importance any other kind of bonds that exist between us and other people, including other family members (Gen. 2:24).
- B. It is meant to carry with it the lifetime obligation for both partners to nurture, protect, and care for each other (physically, emotionally, and spiritually) as Christ does the church (Eph. 5:25) and as they do their own bodies (Eph. 5:31&32).
- C. It is a bond, once created in marriage, that husbands and wives (and any third party) are forbidden by God to do anything to violate (Matt. 19:6).
- D. It is a bond that can be violated (but not dissolved) by certain rebellious or sinful behaviors of the husband or wife (Matt. 19:8&9; Mal. 2:13-16). When it is violated, it releases the non-offending partner from their obligation to continue their marriage covenant with the offending partner when done for biblical reasons and under biblical counsel (Matt. 19:9). According to the bible there are four ways the “one flesh” bond can be violated in marriage:
  1. Gross Immorality: Marital infidelity (sexual relations/activities with anyone besides one’s marriage partner) – Matt. 19:9, Heb. 13:4, and Matt. 5:32, Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18.
  2. Gross Abandonment: Making choices that deny one’s marriage partner the conjugal (sexual) or cohabitational rights of marriage – Ex. 21:10-11; 1 Cor. 7:1-4, 15.
  3. Gross Abuse: Intentionally causing (or threatening to cause) physical harm to one’s marriage partner or children – Ex. 21:10-11; Eph. 5:28-29, 1 Peter 3:7.
  4. Gross Neglect: Refusing or neglecting to meet the basic physical needs or protect the physical well-being of one’s marriage partner or children (when it’s within your means) – 1 Tim. 5:8, Eph. 5:28-29, Ex. 21:10-11.

- E. There are severe spiritual and emotional consequences to violating the “one-flesh” bond in marriage (1 Cor. 6:16-18; Mal. 2:13-16) including forfeiture of the privilege to remarry another partner without it constituting adultery (Mark 10:7-12).
- F. When a marriage ends because of the violation of the “one-flesh” bond by an offending partner, it takes considerable time for the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the “one-flesh” bond between the divorced partners to be completely dissolved. For this reason, our church always counsels the non-offending partner to spend a minimum of two years (after their legal divorce) in active recovery work before pursuing any kind of dating or remarriage relationship.

## Appendix B

### Further Explanation of Biblical Repentance

#### What Biblical Repentance is Not:

The Bible speaks of two types of repentance. One type is self-centered and superficial. The Greek word used in the New Testament for this is *metamelomai*, which means “to have remorse or regret” (See Matt. 27:3 for the use and context for this word).

Webster defines it this way:

“In theology, the pain, regret or affliction which a person feels on account of his past conduct, because it exposes him to punishment. This sorrow proceeding merely from the fear of punishment is called legal repentance, as being excited by the terrors of legal penalties, and it may exist without an amendment of life”.

This type of repentance is called *attrition*, and is defined as:

“Grief for sin arising from fear of punishment; the lowest degree of repentance”.

Repentance of this type is not repentance at all but rather sorrow or grief, or as Paul says in 2 Cor. 7:11 “worldly sorrow”. This is a self-focused sorrow that is based on fear of punishment or of losing something. Sometimes it is a fear of losing acceptance or reputation or just being exposed. It is not sorrow or repentance that produces “fruit that is consistent with repentance” (Matt. 3:8). 1 Sam. 15:10-35 is an example of attrition as opposed to repentance.

Some possible indications of attrition as opposed to true repentance:

- Denial comes first, and confession only after the proof is irrefutable.
- The person only confesses as much as is known about their sin by others. They don’t initially “come clean” on their own with all the details.
- They may be remorseful or sorry for what they did, but they also communicate a sense of being a victim in it all and they may try to spread the blame around.
- They may use minimizing words or terms when referring to their sin.
- They may be agreeable to the idea of restitution or asking forgiveness of the offended party, but they are not the ones who ever bring it up.
- They do not take the lead or any serious action (with the exception of minor actions for show) in changing their lives to remove the things that put them in temptation’s way.

All of these may come with many tears and much sorrow and even confession, but these things are not repentance. It is not loving, kind or merciful to treat attrition as if it were true biblical repentance.

#### What is True Repentance?

The other type of repentance that the bible speaks of is God-centered and God-focused. It is the Greek word *metanoeo* which means “to change one’s mind or purpose”. “This change is always for the better and denotes a change of moral thought and reflection; not merely to repent of, nor to forsake sin, but to change one’s mind and apprehensions regarding it. *Metanoeo* denotes to reform, to have a

genuine change of heart and life from worse to better” (Bullinger’s Dictionary). See Matt. 4:17; Luke 13:3.

Webster defines it this way:

*“Real penitence; sorrow or deep contrition for sin, as an offense and dishonor to God, a violation of his holy law, and the basest ingratitude towards a Being of infinite benevolence. This is called evangelical repentance and is accompanied and followed by amendment of life”.*

*“Repentance is a change of mind, or a conversion from sin to God”.*

*“Repentance is the relinquishment of any practice, from conviction that it has offended God.”*

This type of repentance is also called contrition, and is defined as:

*“Penitence; deep sorrow for sin; grief of heart for having offended an infinitely holy and benevolent God. The word is usually understood to mean genuine penitence, accompanied with a deep sense of gratitude in the sinner, and sincere resolution to live in obedience to the divine law”.*

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says this about repentance:

*“Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”*

Paul tells us that true repentance follows from godly sorrow. Sorrow for having offended God by sinning against Him, violating His laws and dishonoring His name. Godly sorrow comes not from fear of punishment but the realization of the vileness of sin. This type of repentance turns us away from sin and towards God, with no regrets. A good example of godly sorrow and repentance can be found in Psalm 51. The mark of true repentance then is hatred of the sin, turning from it and turning to God out of faith and obedience. True repentance is a gift of God (2 Tim. 2:25; Acts 11:18).

Paul says in 2 Cor. 7:9-11:

*“Now I am happy, not because you had such sorrow, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you were sorry in a godly way, and so you were not hurt by us in any way. For having sorrow in a godly way results in repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regrets. But the sorrow of the world produces death. See what great earnestness godly sorrow has produced in you! How ready you are to clear yourselves, how indignant, how alarmed, how full of longing and enthusiasm, how eager to seek justice! In every way you have demonstrated that you are innocent in this matter”.*

From this we can see some indications of true repentance, the “fruit that is consistent with repentance:”

- Earnestness – ready to face up and deal with the sin, no game playing
- Clear themselves – ready to come clean, confess all, stop what they are doing
- Indignant – godly anger or disdain against their sin
- Alarmed – about the possible consequences or results of their sin
- Longing and enthusiasm – to restore intimacy and set themselves right with God

- Eager to seek justice – to give reparation and satisfaction to all who were wronged

Those who confess and truly repent should/will be confident of God's forgiveness and acceptance because they know God is faithful (1 John 1:9).

### **How are we to know if someone is expressing true repentance?**

As was said before, only God knows the heart. We should treat others as we would like to be treated. And we should be willing to take people at their word initially and be quick to forgive and restore relationship and fellowship. If a person has wronged us, acknowledged the wrong and expressed repentance we should accept it as genuine unless we have reason to question its authenticity. If it happens again, we are to be gracious and fully forgive them again, but restoring relationship and fellowship might not be so quick. If it happens again, we are to once again fully forgive them, but we restore the relationship only after we see some real fruit, over time, consistent with repentance. By now the trust level in the relationship might be severely damaged. With each repeated offense we have more and more reason to question whether the person is repentant at all.

How we respond (or expect people to respond to us) is very dependent on the type of severity of the transgression. A child leaving their dirty clothes on the floor instead of putting them in the clothes hamper is very different from a spouse being involved in an affair. In more weighty matters it is not unreasonable for there to be an extended period that helps prove that the repentance is authentic and thorough. If the church is involved or even in a family there might be some other requirements that the transgressor might need to meet for the restoration process to proceed. But we need to be careful not to put up a lot of fences for people to help them stay on the path. A truly repentant person will take initiative to put up their own fences. People can follow lots of rules without ever having a change of heart.

## Appendix C

### What Matthew 19 Teaches About Divorce

Jesus' most extensive teaching on divorce is found in Matt. 19:3-10. These verses are foundational to understanding how God wants us to make decisions about divorce today. It is important to note that these teachings occur in a conversation in which Jesus is responding to questions posed to him by the Pharisees about a certain kind of divorce ("divorce for any cause at all") that Moses apparently permitted men to obtain in the Old Testament (see Deut. 24:1-4). In this brief addendum, we wish to present the observations from this passage that helped us as church leaders arrive at the position on divorce we present in this paper.

**(V. 3) And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all? (4) And He answered and said, "have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, (5) and said "for this cause a man shall leave His father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?" (6) Consequently, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (7) They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce and send her away?" (8) He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. (9) "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (10) The disciples said to Him, "if the relationship of the man with his wife is like this it is better not to marry."**

**Observation One:** According to Jesus the "one flesh" bond that exists between a husband and wife was meant from the day God created the institution of marriage to be life-long and indissoluble (v. 6), and supersedes in importance and loyalty all other human relationships or bonds, even biological ones (v.5). Although Moses required men who divorced their wives to grant them certificates of divorce, he never granted divorces himself or told people they should divorce. Jesus explicitly prohibits His leaders from doing this (v.6).

**Observation Two:** According to Jesus (v.8) Moses was directed by God in the Old Testament to require men with hard hearts, who no longer wanted to remain married to their wives, not to send them away without granting their wives certificates of divorce. In these cases the certificates of divorce were a provision and concession graciously permitted by God on behalf of the wives (not the hard hearted husbands) to insure that wives who were rejected or abandoned by their husbands were able to remarry and avoid falling into prostitution or poverty along with their children (Deut. 24:1-4).

**Observation Three:** According to Jesus (v.9) the only kind of offense that gives a righteous man (one who doesn't have a hard heart) justification to divorce his wife is an offense that violates the one flesh bond that exists between a husband and his wife. The Greek word used by Jesus for this offense is "porneia" which always means gross immorality of a sexual nature. Gross immorality violates the "one flesh" bond and releases a married person, if they choose, to divorce their partner and remarry another.

**Observation Four:** When read alone, Jesus' teaching in Mark 10:10-12 (as well as Paul's teaching 1 Cor. 7:10) would lead us to conclude that the Bible allows no exceptions for a righteous person to divorce

their spouse. Similarly, reading Matthew 19:3-10 alone would lead us to conclude that Jesus allows only one exception for a righteous person to divorce their spouse – gross immorality. However, by reading these passages in conjunction with Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor. 7:12-16 it becomes apparent that Jesus did not intend by the language He uses here in Matt. 19 to limit the offenses that violate the one-flesh bond in marriage to gross immorality. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 7:12-16 gives us another example of the kind of offense that violates the one-flesh bond between a husband and wife – gross abandonment, like gross immorality, releases a married person to divorce their partner and marry another (1 Cor. 7:15). These gross offenses (gross immorality and gross abandonment) and others like them, mentioned by Moses in Exodus 21:10 & 11 (gross abuse and gross neglect) – violate the one-flesh bond in marriage and constitute the only ground or justification the Bible permits for a righteous person to divorce their partner.

**Observation Five:** As leaders of our church, we feel constrained by God to treat divorce the same way Jesus, Moses and Paul did – as something to be abhorred and avoided by righteous people unless or until the hard heartedness of one partner toward the other results in the kind of gross offense that violates the sacred one-flesh bond that exists between them. Divorce in the case of such gross offenses is permissible (not mandatory), as a provision of redemptive love for both the offending and the offended spouses. It’s redemptive for the offending spouse in that it prevents their offenses from continuing without experiencing the kind of consequences that might bring them to repentance, and it’s redemptive for the offended spouse in that it releases them (and often their children) from having to experience the devastating consequences of protracted exposure to gross immorality, abandonment, abuse or neglect.

**Observation Six:** The response by Jesus’ disciples to His teachings on divorce (v. 10) underscores the serious deterrent to divorce Jesus intends his teachings to be. Understanding the nature of the one-flesh bond that is formed in marriage and the significance God attaches to any violations of it, makes the choice to marry a sober and serious one. For the righteous person, the one striving to please and obey God, marriage is to be treated as a covenant they should never do anything to shatter or violate.

## Appendix D

### What First Corinthians 7 Teaches About Remarriage

Paul's teachings on remarriage are foundational to understanding how God wants us to make decisions about remarriage today. In this brief addendum, we wish to present the observations from this passage that helped us as church leaders arrive at the position on remarriage we present in this paper.

**(vs 7:10) To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. (11) But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband should not divorce his wife. . . (15) But if the unbelieving spouse leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.**

**Observation One:** In verse 10 Paul makes it clear when he says, "Not I, but the Lord," that he is basing his teaching on remarriage in this passage on Jesus' teachings on remarriage. These can be found in Mark 10, Matthew 5 and Matthew 19:

**Mark 10:11&12: - Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.**

**Matthew 5:32 – But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.**

**Matthew 19:9 – I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.**

**Observation Two:** We believe that both Jesus and Paul teach in these passages that it is immoral or adulterous for a person to remarry someone else after they have divorced their previous partner without biblical ground or caused the breakup of their previous marriage by violating their "one-flesh" bond with their previous marriage partner. In 1 Cor. 7:15 Paul addresses these instructions to believers while Jesus in Mark 10, Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 addresses them to both believers and unbelievers. We do not believe, however, that this makes remarriages under these forbidden circumstances an unpardonable sin. Those who have not yet made the decision to remarry under these circumstances are exhorted by both Jesus and Paul (and the leaders in our church) not to. Those who have already remarried under these circumstances, whether in ignorance or disobedience to Jesus' and Paul's exhortations, and who fully repent of their past sinful choices can certainly experience God's grace and blessing on their marriage as long as they seek to obey and honor God now in their marriage (Titus 3:1-8). The Bible explicitly commands couples who remarry under these circumstances to stay married and honor God by fulfilling their marriage vows to each other (1 Cor. 7:27 - See Appendix F for further discussion of how our church handles issues related to adultery, divorce, and remarriage in a person's past).

**Observation Three:** According to Jesus and Paul, a divorced person is free to remarry (without it being immoral or adulterous) only if their previous marriage(s) ended with their partner committing an offense that violated their "one-flesh" bond as husband and wife. In such a case the offended partner is free to remarry another person as long as they are a Christian (1 Cor. 7:39) and they did not violate the

one-flesh bond in a previous marriage or divorce a previous marriage partner without biblical ground (Mark 10:11&12, Matt. 5:32, 19:9).

## APPENDIX E

### **A Further Explanation of the Meaning and Implications of Adultery**

In order to understand the full meaning, weight and implications of the term “adultery”, we first must understand how God views marriage.

First and foremost, marriage was and is God’s idea not man’s (Gen. 2:24). The primary purpose of marriage is not solely man’s happiness or personal fulfillment; marriage, including the idea of family, is God’s design – His divine, deliberate, purposeful plan to display His glory, create and sanctify a people for himself to enjoy and worship Him forever. Marriage by design is a covenant, a solemn and binding oath or bond, and not just a civil contract (Malachi 2:14). Men and women are not only married by religious or civil authorities, they are joined together by God. This is true for believers and nonbelievers alike. Jesus said, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Mark 10:9). This joining together is more than a divinely recorded commitment; it is a spiritual, mystical, divinely created union. Jesus says, “so they are no longer two, but one flesh” (Mark 10:8). God is the one that does the joining and He is the one that intends to do the unjoining, at death or at His coming (Mark 10:9). Finally, God’s design for marriage is a picture, a representation to help us understand the union, the covenantal love relationship between Christ and His church (Eph. 5:31&32). John Piper writes of this relationship between Christ and His church, “He never forsakes her. He never abandons her. He never abuses her. He always loves her. He always takes her back when she wanders. He always is patient with her. He always cares for her and provides for her and protects her and, wonder of wonders, delights in her.”

Given the significance that God gives to marriage it is not surprising that He gives the warning not to separate what He has joined together (Mark 10:9). One way this separation takes place and the bond becomes broken is through death. And although there are other ways this separating can happen, there is probably none more prevalent than adultery.

In regard to marriage, the technical definition of adultery is: Extramarital sex that violates the sanctity and exclusivity of the sexual union that is reserved by God for a husband and wife in marriage.

So why is physical adultery wrong?

- God said don’t do it, therefore it is sin (Exodus 20:14)
- It violates the one-flesh bond between husband and wife
- It is treacherous; a deliberate, often calculated, disregard for trust or faith; the act of violating the confidence of another for personal gain (Malachi 2:14)
- It is lying and promise breaking
- It defiles the marriage bed (Heb. 13:4)
- It weakens and often destroys families.
- It has a negative, lifelong impact on the wellbeing of any children involved (Malachi 2:15).

The physical act of adultery and its effect on marriages and families has been tremendous over the course of human history, but the concept of adultery is bigger, goes deeper, and is more insidious than just the physical act. The Bible tells us there are two additional kinds of adultery that always precede and underlie physical adultery. These may or may not constitute biblical grounds for divorce:

**A. Emotional adultery, or adultery of the heart or mind:**

Jesus Christ warned, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘you shall not commit adultery’. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery already with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). Here Jesus is going deeper than the outward behavior of the physical act of adultery, which is wrong, to the inward willingness to entertain adulterous imaginations in our heart, which is equally wrong. This is because the real issue is purity of heart, and the willingness to indulge our imagination and satisfy our lust, even though imaginary, forsakes our covenant with our spouse, in our heart. The more calloused we become at forsaking our commitment, the harder and colder our heart becomes toward our spouse and the easier it becomes to eventually act out what is already in our heart. Even if the acting out never happens, we have betrayed our loved one in spirit.

**Proverbs 4:23:** Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

**Luke 6:45:** The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings out that which is good, and the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings out that which is evil, for out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.

**Matthew 12:35:** The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

**Matthew 18:18-20:** But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.

As we descend further in the deep waters of the heart, we come to the ultimate form of adultery:

**B. Spiritual adultery:**

God created us for Himself and he is jealous for us; when we choose to satisfy our longings and desires and seek fulfillment in anything other than God and His truth, we betray Him. This betrayal, this adultery, is the source of every kind of sin that besets man. The Old Testament is full of marriage imagery where God depicts His relationship to Israel as a marriage to an adulterous wife (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:6, 8, 9; Ezek. 16:32; Hos. 1:2:3; Rev. 2:22). An apostate church is an adulteress (Isa. 1:21; Ezek. 23:4, 7, 37), and the Jews are described “an adulterous generation” (Matt. 12:39). In the New Testament Paul uses the same marriage imagery between Christ and His church, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” (2 Cor. 11:2).

God has promised us a full and abundant life in Christ (John 10:10). “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his

own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4). Whenever we look away from God and to the world with longing, He calls it lust and evil desires. “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?” (James 4:4-5 ESV).

God wants us to “forsake all others”, believe Him and live our lives in a way that reflects this belief. We are to take Him at His word about what is true and the way life is supposed to operate. This takes faith and trust because it is always contrary to what the world says. God’s economy is different than man’s, but He promises to give us the grace and strength to do it. God promises to draw near to us if we will draw near to Him but we must be willing to let go of all that defiles us and the idea that we can have God and still love the world (James 4:8). So then “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully” (Psalms 24:3-5). “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24 ESV).

## **Conclusion**

Those who have committed physical adultery and wish to repent need to understand that it is a process. Admitting guilt and saying you are sorry is only the beginning. And although desiring repair or restoration of a marriage is a good thing, the primary restoration needs to be with God, for it is against Him you have sinned (Psalm 51:4). Before the physical act of adultery there was emotional adultery, and both were born from spiritual adultery. There is a progression to sin (James 1:14, 15). Therefore, all three (the physical, emotional, and spiritual adultery) must be acknowledged and confessed for repentance and restoration to be complete. If the “wrongness” of entertaining adulterous thoughts is not renounced, then the repentance will not be complete. Likewise, and more importantly, if the rebellion against God and betrayal of Him are not acknowledged, confessed and repented of, then repenting of the physical act will create no real change of heart. Not confronting the spiritual adultery aspect and understanding how it carries over into all other areas of lives will also leave us vulnerable to attacks by the world, the flesh, and the devil in all other areas of our lives.

## Appendix F

### **Adultery, Divorce, Remarriage and Spiritual Leadership at Fellowship Church**

*(this position statement was adapted by our Elders from an April 5, 2007 position paper by the Elders of Mountain View Community Church)*

There are certain leadership roles within the church that we believe are reserved for men (see position paper on Women's Roles in the Church). However, participation in spiritual leadership roles by both men and women may be affected by divorce, remarriage or adultery.

In the list of qualifications for spiritual leadership given by the Apostle Paul we believe the phrase, "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2) means that any man who serves in an elder-like spiritual leadership role in our church must be a "one-woman man" (i.e., faithful and loving in his commitment to his wife). This is consistent with the other qualifications in the list in that it is not absolute but rather there will room for growth, and relates to personal character, rather than to a condition. This interpretation also makes sense grammatically, as the words, "one woman" modify "man" to explain what kind of man. Finally, this interpretation is free from some of the problems that exist with the other interpretations (i.e. it does not contradict Paul's other teachings regarding remarriage being good (1 Cor. 7:25-28, 39), and remaining single being good (1 Cor. 7:1-2).

Consequently, we believe that a divorced person is not automatically disqualified from being an elder, pastor, or spiritual leader in our church. However, we would generally be hesitant to have a divorced person serve in these roles for other reasons, including post-conversion divorce may be a sign of sin in the person's life. Divorce may be an indication of a lack of love, patience, faithfulness, or other issues of character. Divorce may hinder a person's ability as a spiritual leader to enforce biblical standards for marriage and admonish others in this important area of life as may be needed in the local church.

We also need to recognize that divorce may be an indication of difficulty meeting some of the other elder qualifications noted in 1 Timothy 3, such as "above reproach", "self-controlled", and "not quarrelsome". However, it seems crucial at this juncture to make the following observation about all the other qualifications listed for elder in scripture. That is, even though the apostle Paul says that an elder should not be "quarrelsome" or "violent", we do not believe this means that the man has never in his life been characterized by these words. Should we view these qualifications in the sense that the man never exhibited them, or should we interpret this passage to say that by God's grace these qualities have been worked out of a man's life to such a degree that he is now eligible to be examined for leadership? We believe the latter.

At Fellowship, we will not automatically disqualify divorced people from serving in spiritual leadership roles. We will consider each person's situation, including 1) the circumstances of the divorce; 2) the timing of the divorce; 3) the effects of the divorce, and 4) faithful character before deciding whether to ask him/her to serve in this capacity. Moreover, if a person is remarried, we will also look into the timing of the remarriage and its connection, if any, to the divorce.

Although much of the focus of this paper is on divorce, we hasten to note that divorce is only one public example of how an individual might be disqualified from a spiritual leadership role. Certainly, infidelity and adultery, without divorce, would indicate that an individual has not been a faithful and loving partner. Would we ever consider someone for a spiritual leadership role who has been guilty of marital unfaithfulness (i.e. the physical act of adultery)? Perhaps, but not without considering issues such as 1) the timing of the adultery; 2) the impact of the adultery, and 3) the measure of repentance and response of the one who committed adultery.

Our desire at Fellowship is to appoint spiritual leaders who are blameless and above reproach (Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:2), though, obviously not perfect. We will be extremely cautious before allowing a divorced person to serve as an elder, pastor, or spiritual leader at Fellowship for the above stated reasons, because above all we desire to choose leaders who, if married, have solid marriages in which they clearly demonstrate faithfulness, love, and mutual respect. Likewise, we will be reluctant to appoint someone whose marriage appears to be unhealthy or in need of major work by one or both parties. We want each of our leaders, if married, to be a loving, faithful, and true partner.