

# Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

A POSITION PAPER BY THE ELDERS OF  
FAITH BIBLE CHURCH

This position paper constitutes the position of the elders of Faith Bible Church regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. This position paper may be revised from time to time by the Elders of Faith Bible Church and the latest revision is controlling.

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November 13, 1992

Revised June 22, 2016

## INTRODUCTION

The problem of divorce is one of the staggering problems of our society. In 1900 one marriage in twelve ended in divorce; by 1925 it was one of eight; now it is one out of two and increasing.

The problem is not limited to society, it has affected the church. Over the years churches have responded in two ways:

- 1) No divorce and no remarriage of divorced people for any reason.
- 2) Divorce is no different from any other sin and, therefore, it should be confessed, forgiven and forgotten.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the Faith Bible Church position on what God says about marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the Bible. Certainly every case involving a divorce and/or remarriage must be considered individually, but the principles explained herein should provide a Biblical framework to evaluate each individual case.

## THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON MARRIAGE

One man with one woman joined together in a permanent and exclusive union throughout life (Gen. 2:18-25; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:39).

- 1. Marriage was instituted by God.** (Gen. 2:18, 24; Matt. 19:4-6)

God created a wife for Adam and ordained marriage because in His divine opinion He deemed it "not good" for man to be alone. God created man a "suitable helper" to assist him in ruling the earth, raising a family and worshiping God. What takes place today in a marriage ceremony is not primarily the doings of the church or the state. It is first and foremost an act of God.

- 2. Marriage is to be a monogamous relationship.** (Gen. 2:22; Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7-8)

God gave to Adam just one wife. Christ expounded this original ideal with His words: "For this cause shall a man (singular) leave... and shall cleave to his wife (singular) and the two shall be one flesh."

**3. Marriage is to be a heterosexual relationship.** (Gen. 1:27-28; Gen. 2:22)

a. God created for Adam (a male), Eve (a female), sexually different but with equal personal dignity. Adam was not given another human being like himself to marry. Eve was created as a helper suitable for him (Genesis 2:18). In Genesis 1:28, God gives a command for procreation to this man/woman couple which points to the fact that God ordained marriage to be heterosexual. (See Position Paper on Human Sexuality.)

b. Homosexual relationships are sinful and condemned in the Scriptures. (Gen. 19:1-25; Lev. 18:22, 20:13; Rom. 1:24-27) (See Position Paper on Human Sexuality.)

**4. Marriage is separation from parents.** (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7)

Marriage involves a formal and public leaving of one's own parents in order to establish a new family as a married couple.

Leaving one's parents indicates that one is to leave the deepest tie known to a child in order to establish a new tie in marriage that actually supersedes the old.

**5. Marriage is to be a "one flesh" relationship between a man and a woman.** (Gen. 2:24)

The term "one flesh" refers to a unique and profound biological, psychological, and spiritual bond. To be "one flesh" reaches to the depths of a couple's soul. It is the commitment of two wills; it is the blending of two minds; it is the mutual expression of two sets of God-given emotions. Thus, a husband and wife are the male and female parts of a single entity. Therefore, aside from a relationship with the Creator, marriage is the deepest possible relationship into which a man and a woman can enter.

**6. Marriage is to be permanent.** (Eccl. 5:4-7; Mal. 2:16; Mark 10:9)

God expects his people to honor the promises they make including their marriage vows. When describing the marriage relationship, God declares that what He puts together no one should separate (Mark 10:9).

**B. THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON DIVORCE**

**1. God hates divorce** (Mal. 2:16; Matt. 5:32; 19:5-9; 1 Cor. 7:12-15)

Divorce in the Scripture is permitted as an accommodation to man's sin for the protection of the innocent party. It is only a concession to man's sin.

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 intimate unity of the marriage bond. But, divorce was never God's original intention or desire. The New Testament permits (but does not command) divorce in two limited circumstances:

- a) Fornication
- b) Desertion by the unsaved partner

Divorce was a concession for the "innocent party" due to the insensitivity of the other partner to God. This insensitivity is defined Biblically as the "hardness of heart". Dissolution meant the innocent party no longer had to remain in a hopeless and intolerable situation.

## **2. Exceptions of Fornication and Desertion**

### **a) Fornication (Matt. 5:32; 19:1-9; Lev. 18:1-30)**

The word "fornication" is used throughout the New Testament to describe sinful sexual activity of any kind. In the case of married partners, it refers to intimate sexual involvement with someone other than one's mate — either of the opposite sex (heterosexual infidelity, e.g. adultery) or of the same sex (homosexual activity), or bestiality. When a spouse is guilty of immoral sexual conduct with another person and continues to remain unfaithful to the innocent partner; however, the faithful mate is permitted to divorce and remarry. To practice fornication violates God's "one flesh" design for marriage (Gen. 2:24).

### **b) Desertion by the unsaved partner (1 Cor. 7:12-16)**

If an unbelieving partner desires to preserve the marriage the believing partner has no freedom to divorce him/her.

If an unbelieving partner chooses to leave his/her believing spouse, refusing to live with him/her, the believing partner is to let him/her depart.

The word "depart" is a strong word. In Matt. 19:6 and Mark 10:9, it is translated "put asunder" in opposition to "joined together." Some translations read "separate" what God has "joined together."

Both verbs in this verse assume duration. A good translation would be "if the believing one keeps himself separated, let him keep himself separated." Permanence is in mind. The tense of the verbs implies a determined and willful decision to leave a relationship with no desire to return, no interest in cultivating the home, no plan to bear responsibilities, and no commitment to the vows once taken. In the mind of the "deserter," marriage to the "deserted" is over.

In such cases, the believing partner is not "under bondage" to that marriage which has been deserted. The deserted believer is at liberty to leave the marriage bond which has already been broken.

Willful desertion on the part of the unbelieving partner is grounds for divorce. It dissolves the marriage bond and sets the believer free from the former marriage relationship.

Man in his sinfulness, by a life of fornication and/or a decision to permanently separate, "puts asunder" what God has "joined together."

The divine ideal is always forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration. Divorce, even in accordance with the above exceptions, should only be considered as a last resort.

The person who is being divorced, or has been divorced under circumstances other than those permitted above, should go to the other person in accordance with the steps of correction outlined in Article IV, Section D of the FBC Constitution. In spite of these exceptions, the believer must always strive for the divine ideal.

Ideally, Christians are not to permanently separate (divorce). Even where there is adultery, the Bible stresses forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration. In Hosea, for example, the prophet continued to show his love to his adulterous wife and sought for her restoration.

### **C. THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON SEPARATION**

1. Separation is not advisable except by mutual consent for a set time and for prayer. (1 Cor. 7:5)
2. If Christians permanently separate (apart from fornication and/or willful desertion) they are to remain unmarried or to be reconciled to their mate.
3. If a non-Christian mate is willing to live with the Christian, the Christian is to maintain that relationship, except where temporary separation is advisable. (1 Cor. 7:12, 13)
4. Temporary separation is sometimes advisable for the purpose of reconciliation, and may be advisable for the physical or emotional protection of the spouse or children in an abusive situation.

## **A WORD OF COUNSEL:**

Even when adultery takes place or the non-Christian separates, the Christian must be patient, not rushing off into a new relationship. In both cases, it's best for the Christian spouse to wait to pursue a new relationship until:

The adulterer/deserter refuses reconciliation after a legitimate period of time; or

A significant period of time has elapsed since the divorce was finalized; or

The adulterer/deserter has remarried.

## **D. THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON REMARRIAGE**

Remarriage according to the New Testament must be carefully examined on the basis of the classification of those involved.

1. Divorce because of fornication or willful desertion by an unsaved partner (Matt. 5:32, 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15)

Remarriage is neither commanded nor forbidden to the partners involved. The Bible is silent on the matter.

The Bible does not authorize us to distinguish between the innocent or guilty party in the remarriage of these people. This silence cannot be considered positive permission nor is it prohibition.

Forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration are preferable and far more ideal. However, if these are not possible due to the ongoing willful sexual immorality/desertion of the spouse, remarriage is permitted on the basis of the words of Christ and Paul.

In cases like this that are not clearly forbidden, the decision belongs to the couple. They have the responsibility to make the decision based on Scripture and what they believe to be the will of God for them.

2. Divorce for causes other than fornication or willful desertion. (Matt. 5:32, 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:15)

Remarriage of these persons constitutes adultery. However, it can be confessed and forgiven.

3. Widows and Widowers (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:8-9, 1 Tim. 5:14)

Younger widows are encouraged to remarry. For others, remarriage is neither commanded nor forbidden, but it is allowed. It is an acceptable choice and, as with any other major decision in life, should only be entered into following earnest prayer and direction from the Holy Spirit.

**E. THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE CHURCH BODY**  
(Rom. 12:3; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6; 1 John 1:9;)

Everyone in the body of Christ has a responsibility to uphold the Biblical ideal of marriage, especially as exemplified by its leadership. In cases where a person being considered for leadership has been divorced, the church has an obligation to carefully examine the circumstances of the divorce, and potentially to restrict the person's involvement in such leadership. Once it is clear that the person's present lifestyle and/or marriage has been characterized by godliness, pure devotion and sacrificial love over a significant period of time, the person may be considered for leadership.

As previously stated, God hates divorce. Although divorce is no greater a sin than any other, God's forgiveness of this sin does not necessarily mean one is otherwise qualified to be an elder or deacon. 1 Tim. 3:2,12 does not necessarily prohibit previously married men from serving as Elders and Deacons. The qualifications listed in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 deal with qualities that characterize a believer's life. Such believer's qualifications for leadership and/or service must be evaluated on the basis of present character qualities (i.e., conforming to a high standard of morality or being free from legal guilt or fault, blameless), as demonstrated over an extended period of time, rather than his past record of sin.

**F. SUMMARY STATEMENT**

It has been our desire to state as clearly as possible the Biblical position of marriage, divorce, separation, remarriage and leadership within the church body. We have endeavored to speak the truth in love. It is our further desire that this position statement will lead us toward grace and away from a critical and judgmental spirit. Please pray that the Lord will use it to further His kingdom, unify this body, and bring glory to His name.