

First Christian Church (Greeneville, TN)
Position Paper on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage –
May 2015

Theology of Marriage

We as elders at First Christian Church believe that God's Word is the source of authority for defining marriage and setting boundaries for God-honoring marriage relationships. The Bible teaches that the institution of marriage was created by God at the beginning of the human race as a lifelong, monogamous, loving union between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:21-25; Mark 10:6-9; Matthew 19:4-6; Romans 7:2). Marriage is the highest of all human relationships, provided by God as the best environment for relational intimacy (Genesis 2:18, 25) and child rearing (Genesis 1:27-28). The love between a husband and wife is to be an illustration of the love and faithfulness between God and his people (Malachi 2:13-16; Ephesians 5:22-23). Ultimately, marriage is best understood as a lifelong covenant with God, to be about His glory, and not simply a covenant between a man and a woman.

Biblical Divorce

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), but because of the influence of sin in the world, the Bible makes some concessions for divorce and remarriage. The Scriptures provide two justifiable reasons to seek a divorce:

1. If one's spouse has committed adultery (Matthew 5:32; 19:9); and

2. If an unbelieving spouse has abandoned a believing partner (1 Corinthians 7:15)

If an unbelieving spouse is willing to remain married, the believing spouse should not seek a divorce (1 Corinthians 7:12-14). Divorce is allowed (but not required) in the case of adultery because the marriage covenant has been broken. However, because God has reconciled each of us as believers to himself through Christ, not counting our sins against us, and has called us to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-19), if the unfaithful spouse seeks forgiveness and demonstrates sincere repentance and a willingness to recommit to the marriage relationship, we encourage (but do not require) the faithful spouse to offer forgiveness and reconciliation.

Remarriage

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner when the divorce was on these two biblical grounds. As a principle, those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God and their partner, and may not remarry, but rather should seek to be reconciled to their former spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). For them to marry another is an act of “adultery” (Mark 10:11-12).

However, we have identified five scenarios under which a person who has previously been married may marry again consistent with Biblical teaching:

1. The former spouse has passed away (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2-3)

2. The unbelieving spouse abandoned the marriage (1 Corinthians 7:15)
3. The marriage covenant was broken by adultery (Matthew 19:9)
4. The divorce occurred prior to salvation (e.g. prior to their “calling”) (1 Corinthians 7:20,27-28)
5. The former spouse has remarried (making reconciliation impossible) (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

Separation

We recognize that these Biblical guidelines do not allow divorce under other circumstances where divorce might seem warranted. The Bible does make a distinction between physical separation and divorce (1 Corinthians 7:5), so we would counsel people in certain difficult marital situations (e.g., situations involving physical or emotional abuse, or addictive or criminal behavior) that physical separation may be advisable, and even necessary. Although not explicitly addressed in Scripture, in the case of a person who is in physical danger, or has been physically harmed by his or her spouse, divorce may be warranted as a matter of wisdom. Such matters should be brought before the elders of the church for guidance.

Current Situation

God is loving and merciful. The grace of Christ can be extended to those who have divorced for unbiblical reasons. Those who have made wrong decisions in the past cannot undo their mistakes, but should be faithful to Christ in the situation in which they currently find themselves. We counsel

those who have initiated divorce for unbiblical reasons to repent and to seek reconciliation with their former spouse if they have not yet remarried. If unable or unwilling to reconcile, we counsel those who have been divorced for unbiblical reasons to not remarry. However, we counsel those who have remarried outside of Biblical boundaries to repent of their divorcing, and to remain faithful to the one to whom they are currently married (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Church Leadership

Questions often arise as to whether a person who has been divorced is eligible for a leadership position at FCC. Because the Scripture says that elders and deacons must be “the husband of but one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2, 12, literally “a one woman-man”), some contend that a person desiring to be in church leadership must not have been divorced. It is our position that a divorce in a person’s past does not automatically disqualify that person from future church leadership. The nature and circumstances of the divorce and the length of time of proven credibility are all taken into account in determining whether a person is qualified for a leadership position. If murder did not disqualify Paul from becoming an apostle and missionary, a divorce in someone’s past should not automatically disqualify that person from serving as a church leader.

According to Jesus Christ’s instructions in the Bible, Christians must live in a manner distinct from that of the world. Christians are commanded to hold to a higher standard of moral virtue and purity, guided by the principles

contained in God's Word. We institute these guidelines and practices in an effort to help our members to reflect Christ's love for the church in their marriages.

Note: Adapted from Southeast Christian Church's Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage © 2003 (www.southeastchristian.org) and from <http://www.gty.org/resources/articles/A377/Common-Questions-Regarding-Divorce-and-Remarriage>

See also: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2341/>