



DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

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Divorce and remarriage is an area of controversy among Christians. It is admittedly a difficult and complex issue. Positions on the issue range from “no divorce, no remarriage under any circumstances” to a very open position allowing for divorce stemming from reasons even of simple “incompatibility.” The elders of South Plains Bible Chapel have issued this paper which we feel reflects the spirit and letter of Scripture. We recognize that others may hold differing views and we certainly respect their right to do so. However this paper represents the official position of South Plains Bible Chapel on the matter of divorce and remarriage.

Marriage is a Lifetime Contract in the Purpose of God

Genesis 2:24 speaks of the man and woman “cleaving” to each other and “becoming one flesh.” Thus, breaking a marriage is like rending the body apart.

The marriage contract is intended to be binding until death (1 Cor 7:39).

Marriage is symbolic of Christ and His Church (Eph 5:31, 32) who are bound together in an indissoluble union.

Malachi 2:16 says that the Lord hates divorce; the Lord Jesus reaffirms this in Matthew 19:3-9 (“what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”).

Dissolution of Marriage is Permitted (But Not Required) for Fornication

Fornication is named by the Lord Jesus as grounds for divorce (Matt 19:3-9). *Fornication* is used in Scripture to denote “harlotry” (Luke 15:30), “incestuous relationships (1 Cor 5:1), homosexual relationships (Jude 1:7), betrothal unfaithfulness (Deut 22:13-21), and marital unfaithfulness (Prov 7:10-20; Hosea 2:2; Jer 3:6-9; Ezek 16:28-34), where adultery and fornication are used synonymously.

As shown above, the restricting of the term *fornication* to mean only “betrothal unfaithfulness” is to ignore its usage in other parts of the Bible.

Although the Lord Jesus permits divorce for fornication, He does not require it. There is no command in the Bible that marriage *must* be broken off for this or any other sin. There is a better course—to forgive and be reconciled (cf Hosea 1-3).

Dissolution of Marriage is Permitted for Desertion by an Unbeliever

Desertion of a believing mate by an unbeliever constitutes grounds for divorce (1 Cor 7:15), because the believing mate “is not under bondage.”

The fact that the deserted Christian is not bound means that the marriage contract is no longer binding and that a divorce may be sought. This situation is in direct contrast to that of 1 Cor 7:11

where the separated believer is bound to the spouse. The same root word (*bound* or *bondage*) is used in 1 Cor 7:27, 39 where it refers to the marriage contract. Moreover, the incentive to remain with the unbelieving partner (i.e., that the unbelieving partner is sanctified by the believing spouse) is nullified when the unbelieving partner deserts.

Two Christians joined in wedlock do not have grounds for divorce outside of fornication. Allowance is made for separation, but there is no allowance for divorce (“putting away”) or remarriage (“let her remain unmarried”). The reason stated is that the door must be open for reconciliation.

Scriptural Divorce Gives a Right to Remarry

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 24:1, 2 which clearly states that a right to divorce conveys a right to remarry (Matt 19:8).

Since a scriptural divorce is a dissolution of marriage, the scripturally divorced person is an unmarried person.

When a former partner marries, the other party is automatically freed from the bonds of that marriage, regardless of where the guilt lies, and thus is free to remarry.

Remarriage is not permitted for desertion of a believer by a believer, unless the deserting party remarries (thus committing adultery and breaking the marriage bond).

Remarriage is not permitted in the absence of fornication or desertion of a believer by a believer while the divorced partner is still living.

Remarriage is permitted when a former divorced partner is deceased.

Moral Failure, When Duly Repented of, Cannot Bar the Offender from Fellowship

When a person comes to Christ, he is forgiven of all failures in life, moral or otherwise (2 Cor 5:17). Human obligations may continue, however. If he is divorced and remarried before salvation, he should remain in the new marriage since to remarry the former spouse (even if possible) would be an abomination (Deut 24:3,4). If he is divorced without scriptural cause and has not remarried and his spouse has not remarried, he may be reconciled to the former spouse or remain unmarried.

Unscripturally divorced persons or unscripturally remarried persons should not be barred from church fellowship if there is clear evidence of repentance.

The right hand of fellowship may be denied for those who deliberately obtain an unscriptural divorce or remarriage against counsel.

When considering a divorced person for an official church position, the elders must weigh the facts of each case in order to determine eligibility.