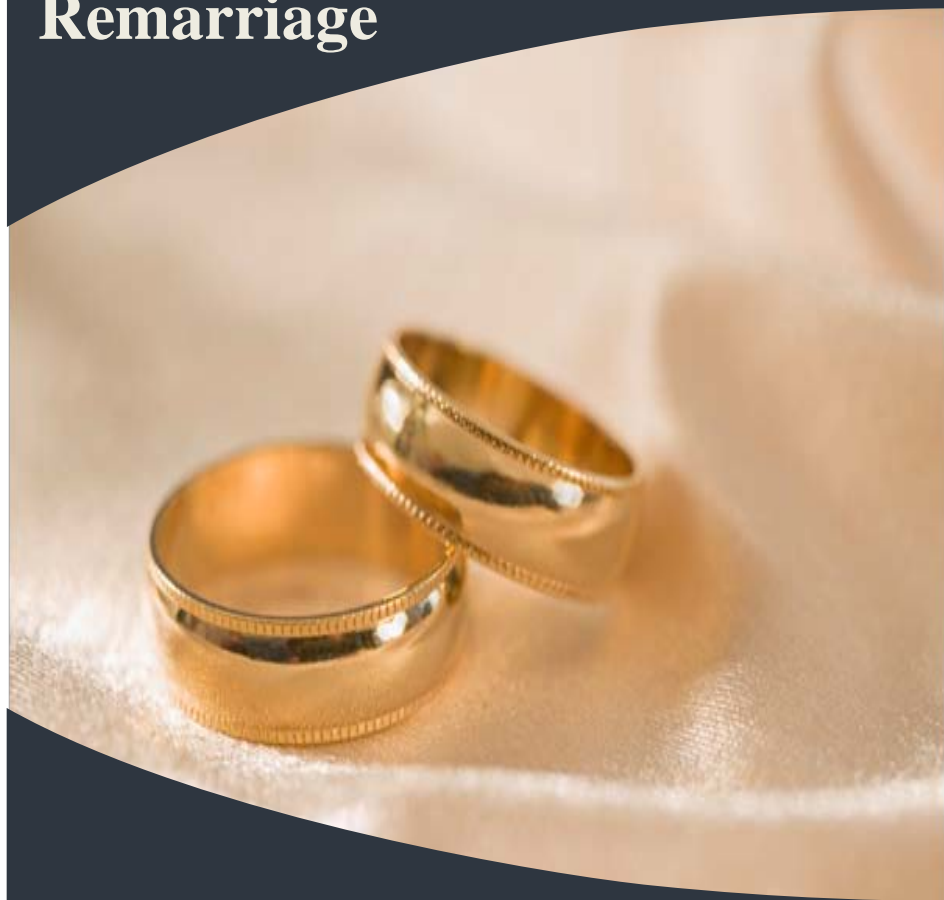


Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage



Grace Church Distinctives

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Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

We live in a morally confused day and age. Our society attempts to blur the lines between right and wrong and seeks to normalize sin. This is especially apparent in the breakdown and moral confusion surrounding marriage in our culture. As a church which seeks to adorn the gospel of Christ Jesus, we desire to uphold God's standards in our lives. Since marriage is such a foundational aspect of human life, we must understand God's design for marriage and the complications caused by sin. By doing this, we seek to be a marriage keeping church which upholds the divine standard for marriage.

God's Design for Marriage

God, the creator of the universe, ordained the institution of marriage from the beginning of the world (Gen. 2:18, 2:24). Marriage is the formation of a new union and new priorities which involve a man and woman leaving mother and father to be united to one another in a lifelong, monogamous relationship. It is a covenant relationship which should not be broken (Mal. 2:14). The New Testament also tells us that marriage is extremely important because it was designed by God to be a picture of Christ's relationship to the Church (Eph. 5:31-32). In Matthew 19:6, Jesus states that that which God has joined together no man should separate.

The Nature of Divorce

Divorce separates that which God has joined. This is not part of God's intent for marriages. It shatters the unity, intimacy, and love that marriage was designed for and obscures the picture of Christ and His Church. Therefore, believers should make every effort to avoid divorce.

Nevertheless, Scripture does *permit* divorce in some cases. In Matthew 19:3-9, Jesus clearly states that divorce was permitted by Moses only as a result of the sinful hearts of the people, but this was not God's original design for the marriage relationship.

Biblical Grounds for Divorce

There are only two biblical grounds for divorce: 1). Sexual sin, 2). Desertion by an unbelieving spouse. The first accommodation is found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. The Greek word used by Jesus is *porneia*. This term encompasses many forms of sexual sin such as adultery, homosexuality, and incest. This exception is not intended to promote divorce. The innocent party should follow the steps of Matthew 18:10-20 and involve his or her church leadership in the process. Even in cases of severe sexual sin, a *genuinely* repentant heart and faith in Jesus' sacrifice for sin is met by the forgiveness of God and should result in the restoration of the marriage (Matt. 6:14, 18:21-35). If all means to bring the offending partner to *true* repentance fail, the faithful member is *permitted* to seek divorce. Even in this instance, he or she should seek the wisdom and help of the church's elders.

The second reason for divorce, desertion by an unbelieving spouse, is found in 1 Corinthians 7:15. If an unbelieving mate does not want to live with his or her believing spouse, the believing spouse may let the unbeliever seek a divorce. If the unbelieving partner permanently leaves the marriage relationship but is unwilling to seek a divorce (to avoid monetary obligations etc.), the believing spouse "is not under bondage in such cases" and may have grounds to seek a divorce under the guidance of his or her church leadership (1 Cor. 7:15). If, however, the unbelieving partner consents to remain with the Christian in marriage, a divorce must not be sought.

Believers who seek a divorce apart from the biblical grounds stated above are subject to church discipline for their open disobedience to God's Word.

Remarriage

Is remarriage ever allowed? If the divorce was a biblical divorce, then remarriage is allowed for the faithful partner. Remarriage would also be permitted in the case of a believer who was divorced prior to conversion and has since repented of the sin (1 Cor. 7:8-9 cf. v. 34). Counsel should be sought from the elders, however, to ensure there are no biblical obligations he or she must fulfill to the previous spouse.

If a divorce is not based on the biblical parameters above, remarriage to another person is usually not permitted. To remarry in this instance would be to commit adultery (Matt. 5:31-32). Instead, the offending party should repent. Upon true repentance, God's grace will cleanse him or her. A truly repentant heart will then seek to restore the broken marriage as outlined in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. In some cases, this restoration may not be possible. For example, one of the members might have already remarried. In this situation, the other partner *may* be free to remarry another. Situations such as this should be brought before the elders in order to seek wisdom in defining any biblical obligations for those seeking remarriage.

In cases where a Christian obtained an unbiblical divorce and then an unbiblical remarriage, he or she has committed adultery in God's eyes (Mark 10:11-12). The individuals in this unbiblical remarriage should confess their sin to God. Once the sin is repented of, God will immediately forgive that sin. A person in this situation should remain in his or her current marriage relationship and realize that it is a valid marriage in God's eyes even though it began with adultery.

In any case, a Christian seeking remarriage must only marry “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39, 2 Cor. 6:14). That is to say that he or she can only marry another believer.

The Church’s Responsibility

The church should seek to help struggling marriages. At Grace Church we want our people to help bear one another’s burdens and to speak truth to one another. We encourage people in struggling marriages to ask for help. Get an elder involved before things become more and more difficult to reconcile. Seek accountability and encouragement from other godly couples before trouble strikes.

The church must realize that divorce and unbiblical remarriage are not the unpardonable sin. Upon genuine repentance and efforts to restore a marriage relationship (if appropriate in the situation), the church *must* be willing to forgive as God does.

The church can and should provide wisdom in defining the biblical obligations of those seeking divorce or remarriage. These decisions should not be arbitrarily made but must be based on the truth of God’s Word. Individuals facing divorce or considering remarriage should seek counsel from the elders to help determine how the Word of God applies to their particular situation. Our goal is to obey God’s Word so that we bring no reproach upon the name of our Savior.

Finally, the church should seek to clarify the confusion caused by our culture which tends to muddy the moral waters around us. We should be a marriage keeping body of believers that holds its members to the biblical standard. This is necessary if we are to keep the marriage relationship the God-honoring institution it was designed to be.