

Grace Covenant Church

STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE & DIVORCE

The issue of divorce is a very solemn issue. Though divorce itself is not always sinful, it is always the result of sin. (Ezra 10) It is our conviction that as a Christian community we must seek to invest heavily in maintaining healthy marriages. The committed marriage of two believers is a beautiful picture of Christ's relationship to His bride, the church. The body of Christ should feel a sense of responsibility to minister to one another in support of each other's marriages.

The Bible does, however, leave the option of divorce open as a last resort in cases of adultery (Matthew 7) and when an unbelieving spouse leaves his or her companion (1 Corinthians 7). The issue of remarriage is much more complicated than even the divorce issue; however, remarriage may be considered in the scenarios above -- but with extreme caution and much counsel.

Statement of Guidelines for Mutual Accountability

In view of this, we agree to live by the following guidelines concerning the nurturing of marriages and the exercise of redemptive church discipline wherever needed.

1. A believer and unbeliever should not marry (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-15).
2. Since death breaks the marriage bond (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39), remarriage is permissible without sin for a believing widow or widower, if the marriage is with another believer.
3. Divorce may be permitted when a spouse decisively and physically deserts the relationship; commits repeated, unrepentant adultery; or is guilty of protracted, unrepentant life-endangerment (1 Cor. 7:15; Mat. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:11). We do not believe that divorce must be the last word. Even after long periods of separation and alienation, reconciliation can happen, as when the people of God return to the Lord after periods of waywardness, (Hosea 2:14-23).
4. We want to emphasize that the phrase "divorce may be permitted" holds out the possibility that inquiry may reveal that the deserted partner engaged in a wrong behaviour that drove the other away, so that a change is called for at home rather than divorce. And we want to stress that forgiveness and reconciliation between sinning spouses is preferable to separation or divorce even where adultery has occurred. This is implied in Matthew 18:21-22, "Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'" (Luke 17:3-4.)

5. The remarriage of a divorced spouse may be viewed as severing the former marriage so that the unmarried spouse whose behaviour did not biblically justify being divorced may be free to remarry a believer, (Matthew 19:9), if he or she has confessed all known sin in the divorce, and has made significant progress in overcoming any destructive behaviours and attitudes.
6. Recognizing the honest and devout differences of conviction of committed Christians on this issue, those of us with more limiting standards for remarriage consent at this point not to make them normative for the whole local assembly. Others of us, who regard this fourth statement as fully biblical, respect those among us with a more limiting interpretation and do not require or expect them to act in any way against their consciences in attending, supporting, or performing enactments of marriage they regard as contrary to Scripture.
7. All of us urge every member who contemplates remarriage to struggle in prayer and study with all the relevant Scriptures, with the aim of glorifying God through full obedience to His Word, and consider fairly the arguments against remarriage and those for it.
8. Moreover, we want to affirm the goodness and beauty of a life of singleness in God's service both before marriage and after divorce or death. It is commended in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 11, 32-35, and elevated by the examples of Jesus and Paul and many great single saints.
9. After serious efforts have been made toward reconciliation, the aggrieved partner referred to in Guideline #3 may, together with the leadership of the church, come to regard the marriage as irreparably broken. In such cases remarriage may be a legitimate step, if taken with serious reckoning that this cuts off all possibility of a reconciliation that God may yet be willing to produce. (See Guideline #7).
10. The aggrieving partners referred to in Guideline #3 (who were guilty of abandonment, adultery, or life-endangerment) should repent and be reconciled to God and to their spouses (1 Corinthians 7:11; 1 John 1:9). If it is too late because their spouses have remarried, then they should remain single because they left their first marriage without biblical warrant (Matthew 19:9; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:11).
11. If a second marriage ends in death or divorce, the widow or widower in this case is not permitted to return to the first spouse in marriage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Even though divorce is permissible under the circumstances described above, we want to emphasize that it is not required. It is not the best testimony to the covenant keeping love of Christ and His church. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7).

When divorce seems inevitable, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it is threatened with seeming dissolution. Therefore, when a member of **Grace Covenant Church** is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our elders and cooperate with them as they determine whether biblical grounds exist for the separation, and as they endeavour to promote repentance and reconciliation, and pursue redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

Separated spouses who are moving toward divorce, but are still legally married, should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is warranted according to the guidelines mentioned above, and that every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace, and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God also graciously extends His love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him, (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done what the Scripture requires to rebuild broken relationships.