

Divorce and Remarriage

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Doctrinal Conviction of Pastor-Teacher Paul B. Phair and Elder Team Policy

God's Plan:

The Bible teaches that God is the creator and designer of marriage (Gen. 1-2). He intends that marriage be a union of fulfillment between one woman and one man for life. Marriage is so significant and beautiful that God used it as an illustration of the relationship between Christ and His church (Eph. 5:29). Divorce always shatters the ideal purpose of God. It always brings deep hurt, grief, and anger. Everyone loses: the spouses, children, extended families, and friends. Therefore, God hates divorce (Mal. 2:15).

Biblical Exceptions:

Marriage is a life-long covenant that only God is to break (through death, 1 Cor. 7:39; Rm. 7:2ff). The breaking of that covenant is not to be done by any human (Mt. 19:6). However, when one partner breaks that covenant by sexual infidelity (a dissolution of the "one flesh" relationship, e.g., Mt. 19:9) or by permanent willful desertion (1 Cor. 7:15), the other partner is permitted to obtain a divorce as a legal recognition that the guilty party has in fact ended the marriage. Remarriage is a legitimate option for the victim under these circumstances.¹ The guilty individual would need to repent and take all possible steps toward reconciliation before his/her remarriage would become a legitimate option; remarriage,

except under biblically established permissions, constitutes an act of adultery (Mt. 19:9). While divorce and remarriage are permissible under the above circumstances, they are not commanded; God's heart is always for reconciliation.

Clear violations of God's standards for marriage by members of the church, whether it be infidelity or the pursuit of an unbiblically permissible divorce, are bases for the loving but difficult process of admonishment and discipline by the church (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5).

At Oakwood, we have many innocent people with painful divorces in their past, and many guilty ones too who've been forgiven! We strive to reflect the twin attributes of Jesus, displaying truth and grace to others – and to do so in a manner that honors Him. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NASB)⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ **Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Highly Perplexing Circumstances:

There are very difficult situations in which a relatively innocent spouse is subject to nearly intolerable behaviors by their spouse for which there are no explicit biblical permissions for divorce and remarriage. Such situations could include physical and sexual abuse, chemical dependencies, refusal to provide financial (1 Tim. 5:8) and emotional support, etc. Separation may be necessary in order to preserve the physical and emotional well-being of the victimized spouse. All attempts at bringing about repentance and reconciliation should be made between the partners. However, as a last resort, divorce and remarriage *may* be permissible if the unbeliever (or the "so-called Christian" who is behaving as an unbeliever) will not reform and reconcile or pursues divorce apart from the consent of the believer. This perspective seems to be in keeping with the spirit of the apostle Paul's revelation concerning *desertion* in 1 Corinthians 7.

The principles of Romans 14 are also applicable in the above situations. The individual who is prayerfully contemplating divorce in highly perplexing situations should especially consider verses 5 and 22: "*Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind....The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*" Members of the church who observe the struggles and decisions of individuals in these circumstances should especially consider verse 4: "*Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls...*"

For a fuller presentation of the above biblical conviction, consult the following sources: ● *Divorce And Remarriage As It Affects The Licensing And Ordination Of Ministers Within The Evangelical Free Church Of America*, written by scholars and pastors within the EFCA and officially endorsed by the EFCA ministerial and general conference as the standard for EFCA ministerial credentialing, ● *An Evangelical View of Divorce and Remarriage*, Paul B. Phair, 1978, ● *Divorce and Remarriage*, Guy Duty, Bethany Fellowship, ● *Divorce and Remarriage: Recovering the Biblical View* by William F. Luck, Harper & Row.

Biblical qualification of the church leadership positions of deacon and elder as it pertains to marriage:

1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6; Eph. 5:25-33; Mt. 5:27,28; Mt. 19:1-11; 2 Tim. 2:2

One biblical qualification for a deacon or elder is "*the husband of one wife*". This means if he is married, he should be purely devoted to his own wife. He should be known literally as a "*one woman man*". Whether married or single, his reputation in relationships with the opposite sex should be *beyond reproach*.

The apostle Paul's qualification list is not intended to be exhaustive, but suggestive of the kinds of character qualities to look for in prospective church leaders. Each qualification is a standard that all believers should strive to meet. However, those who are selected for church leadership especially need to meet these character qualities. Paul guides the church to look for those who demonstrate genuineness, maturity, and depth of relationship to Jesus Christ.

A person's somewhat distant past is not the focus if he has been forgiven and has now demonstrated a consistent pattern of godly character in response to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, neither those who have been sexually impure before or during a marriage in the past, nor those who have been divorced for whatever reason, are automatically disqualified by this qualification. However, as in the case with all other qualities, those who have been divorced or those who have been immoral in the past should be carefully evaluated. Those who have been immoral in the past should evidence genuine brokenness before God for their sin and a humble gratefulness and devotion to God for His forgiveness. Those who have had inappropriate or dysfunctional relationships in the past should evidence that these ill patterns have been significantly transformed and that sufficient emotional healing has occurred. There must now be a clear pattern of healthy intimate relationships with others.

For a fuller presentation of the above biblical conviction, consult *Divorce and Remarriage: Recovering the Biblical View* by William F. Luck, Harper & Row, pages 208-218.

Elder Board Policy

We recognize the perplexities of the divorce and remarriage issue and that there are good and godly people who radically disagree. However, the elder board supports the above biblical convictions of our pastor-teacher, Dr. Paul B. Phair. We encourage him to teach, counsel, and perform marriages within our church according to his stated convictions. We apply the principles of our pastor's stated convictions in matters concerning application for church membership and church discipline. Furthermore, his stated interpretation regarding the meaning of "*husband of one wife*" is the criteria that we follow in presenting deacon and elder candidates before our congregation.

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¹Divorce in the Old Testament (Deut.24) completely dissolved the marriage thus permitting the spouse to remarry without being considered an adulterer. In Jesus' day the debate centered on the *basis* for divorce, not on the right to then remarry. In Mt. 19, Jesus did not pronounce a new kind of divorce which only meant separation. His discussion does not involve the meaning of divorce, rather it centers on the basis for the dissolution of marriage. It is only those who divorce on unbiblical grounds who are commanded not to further sin by remarriage (1 Cor. 7:11). But if the divorce is biblical, then the spouse is completely free from the marriage bond, and is thereby eligible for remarriage (1 Cor. 7:15); if Paul only meant separation without the right to remarry, then the Christian spouse would still be under bondage rather than being free.