

Grace Place Position Paper Regarding Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

INTRODUCTION

The practice of divorce is on the increase. In 1900 one marriage in twelve ended in divorce; by 1925 it was one out of eight, now it is one out of two. As a result of this growing practice, the church has responded in a variety of ways:

1. No divorce and no remarriage of divorced people for any reason.
2. Divorce, but no remarriage of divorced people for any reason.
3. Divorce and remarriage for the reasons of adultery or desertion.
4. Divorce and remarriage under a variety circumstances.

The extreme poles of the responses are represented by **no divorce and remarriage for any reason** and **divorce is no different from any other sin, and therefore; it should be confessed, forgiven, and forgotten.**

The purpose of this paper is to present Grace Place's understanding of what God says about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Certainly every case involving divorce and/or remarriage must be considered individually, but the principals explained in this position paper provide a Biblical framework in which to evaluate each individual case.

THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON MARRIAGE

One man with one woman joined together in a permanent union throughout life (Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

1. **Marriage was instituted by God. (Genesis 2:18, 24; Matthew 19:4-6)**
God created a wife for Adam and established marriage because He determined it "not good" for man to be alone. God created man a "helper" to partner with him in ruling the earth, raising a family, and worshipping God. Marriage is not just a legal contract, but a covenant made with God and between the husband and wife.
2. **Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. (Genesis 2:22; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7, 8)**
God gave Adam one wife. Christ expounded this original ideal with the words, "For this cause shall a man (singular) leave...and shall cleave to his wife (singular) and the two shall become one flesh." (Matthew 19:5)
3. **Marriage is to be a heterosexual relationship. (Genesis 1:27; 2:22)**
God created for Adam (a male), Eve (a female). Adam was not given other humans for him to marry. Eve was created as his companion. The command to populate the earth points to the fact that God ordained marriage to be

heterosexual. (Genesis 1:28) Note: Though God loves all people regardless of sexual orientation, He clearly states that homosexual relationships are sinful and condemned in the Scriptures. (Genesis 19:1-25; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9)

4. **Marriage is a separation from parents. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7, 8)**

Marriage involves a leaving of one's own parents in order to establish a family as a married couple. Leaving one's parents indicates the commitment to establish a new relationship that actually supersedes the former.

5. **Marriage is the deepest possible relationship into which a man and woman can enter. (Genesis 2:24)**

The term "one flesh" refers to a unique biological, psychological, and spiritual bond. To be "one flesh" is the commitment of wills. It is the blending of two minds. It is the mutual expression of two sets of God-given emotions. A husband and a wife are the male and female parts of a single unit.

6. **Marriage is intended to be for the life of the individuals. (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9; Matthew 19:6)**

When two people are married, God binds them in a union which is never to be broken. To do so is to cause severe damage. Divorce is not like dissolving a business partnership, but is more like an amputation.

A BIBLICAL POSITION ON DIVORCE

1. **God hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:5-9)**

In Matthew 19:5-9, Christ teaches that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin and in violation of God's sovereign purposes for the intimate unity of the marriage bond. Divorce is viewed as a concession to man's sin. Divorce was never the original intention or desire for marriage. Even if there are biblical grounds for divorce, it is not mandatory.

NOTE: The husband's of Malachi's day were divorcing their wives without sufficient reason (an abuse of the Torah), and the Lord is about to divorce Judah with sufficient reason (Jeremiah 3:8).

2. **Grounds for Biblical Divorce:**

a) **Illicit sexual behavior (Matthew 5:32; 19:1-9)**

Various translations render Matthew 19:9 and its use of the word *porneia* differently e.g. fornication (KJV); marital unfaithfulness (NIV); adultery (NASB); sexual promiscuity (Message) . The use of this Greek word suggests illicit sexual activity of any kind such as premarital sex, adultery, incest, prostitution, and homosexuality.

When a spouse is guilty of immoral sexual conduct and continues to remain unfaithful, the freedom is there for the faithful spouse to divorce. Divorce, however is not mandatory.

NOTE: The Greek word for *divorce* is used with regard to the Deuteronomy passage (24:1-4). There, *divorce* clearly did dissolve the marriage bond. Jesus did not change the nature of divorce as dissolving the marriage. He did however throw out the excuses, reasons, and causes except *porneia*, any sexual deviance/immorality. Jesus did not alter the meaning of divorce, but He changed the grounds for divorce. He limited them.

b) Desertion by an unbelieving partner (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

1. If an unbelieving partner wants to preserve the marriage, the believing partner has no ground to divorce him/her. However, if an unbelieving spouse chooses to leave his/her believing spouse, refusing to live with him/her, the believing partner is to let him/her depart.
2. The word translated *depart* is translated in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9 as “tear asunder” in opposition to “joined together.” The tense of the verb as it is used in 1 Corinthians 7 implies a determined and willful decision to leave a relationship with no desire to return, no plan to bear responsibility, no commitment to the vows once taken.
3. In such cases, the believing partner is not “under bondage” to the marriage which has been deserted (1 Corinthians 7:15). The deserted believer is at liberty to leave the marriage bond which has already been broken.
4. Willful desertion on the part of the unbelieving partner is a ground for divorce. Man in his sinfulness, whether through sexual deviance and/or a decision to permanently separate can and often does tear apart what God has joined together.

THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON SEPARATION

1. Separation is not advisable except by mutual consent for a set time and for spiritual purposes (1 Corinthians 7:5). Believers are not to permanently separate (1 Corinthians 7:10,11). The Bible stresses forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration.
2. If believers separate (except for sexual deviance and/or willful desertion), they are to remain unmarried or be reconciled to their spouse (1 Corinthians 7:11).

3. If an unbelieving spouse is willing to live with the believer, the believer is to maintain relationship (1 Corinthians 7:12,13), except where temporary separation is advisable (see next paragraph).
4. While not specifically addressed in Scripture, temporary separation is sometimes advisable for the purpose of reconciliation/restoration such as the physical or emotional protection of the spouse and/or children in an abusive situation. The church stands ready to offer counsel and referral information in those matters.

THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON REMARRIAGE

Remarriage according to the New Testament must be examined on the basis of the situation/circumstance of those involved.

1. For those who are divorced due to sexual unfaithfulness/deviance and/or willful desertion of an unsaved spouse:

Remarriage is neither commanded nor forbidden to the parties involved (**Matthew 19:9**). This silence cannot be considered positive permission, nor is it prohibition. Forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration are preferable and far more ideal.

2. For those who are divorced for causes other than sexual unfaithfulness/deviance and/or willful desertion:

Remarriage of these persons constitutes adultery. New Testament references in the Gospels give a word of caution to anyone who considers marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on Biblical grounds, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (**Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11,12**).

The remarriage of illegitimately divorced people is an *act* of adultery not a *life* of adultery. That means that even though remarriage is a grievous act, it may be repented of and forgiven without dissolving the present marriage (**2 Corinthians 5:16,17**).

NOTE: Some have taught that to remarry is to enter an adulterous relationship. This position suggests that to live with a second husband or second wife is to live in a state of sin. This is a very unlikely interpretation. In the Old Testament, adultery was not only condemned, it was to be dealt with by stoning the adulterous pair. Yet, remarriage was a valid institution. If an adulterous state were involved, God would have dealt with it as sin. He did not. At the very least He would have commanded the separation of couples who had entered into second marriages. There is no hint of that any place in

the Old Testament. Nor is there any such teaching in the New Testament. Jesus is clear about the ideal, and he is clear about the sin. Yet in no place does God prescribe separation for those who have remarried.

3. For widows and widowers:

For such persons remarriage is neither commanded nor forbidden, but is allowed (**Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:6-9; 1 Timothy 5:14**).

Circumstances leading to divorce are hurtful to individuals, families, and the church. Therefore, we discourage divorce for any reason, however, where those scriptural exceptional circumstances exist; we recommend that the question of remarriage be resolved by the believer in the light of God's Word. That resolve may include the counsel of one or more Grace Place pastors.

THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON MEMBERSHIP FOR DIVORCED AND REMARRIED

1. Individuals who divorce and remarriage prior to conversion.

There are individuals who experienced divorce and remarriage prior to their acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord of their life. Local membership is available to these individuals in spite of prior marriage entanglements since they are new creations and the old things have passed away (2 Corinthians 5:16, 17). Further, we leave their marriage complications in the hands of the Lord and are willing to forgive whom God forgives and accept whom God accepts.

2. Individuals who divorce and remarry as members of the church.

The body of Christ has the responsibility to uphold the biblical ideal of marriage. However, recognizing there are biblical grounds for divorce and the allowance for remarriage (in the cases of sexual deviance and/or desertion by an unbelieving spouse), membership would be unaffected. If a divorce and/or remarriage takes place for any other reason, forgiveness is possible if there is confession and repentance. However, substantial counsel and consideration will be given to the circumstances and membership status of the individual(s) by the pastoral staff on a case by case basis. If discipline is appropriate, it should be meted out with high regard for forgiveness and reconciliation (2 Corinthians 2:1-10; Galatians 6:1).

THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON LEADERSHIP FOR DIVORCED AND REMARRIED

1. Pastoral and Directorship Level Positions

The Grace Place pastoral staff has an obligation to carefully examine any past divorce and/or remarriage in any pastoral or directorship position within the local church. A person who desires to be considered for one of these

positions needs to be willing to allow the pastors to inquire discreetly about the candidate's previous marriage experience. The pastors will then carefully and compassionately determine whether the individual is to be considered for the position (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-8).

2. Ministry Leaders, Program Coordinators, and Ministry Team Members

The Grace Place Management Team (pastors and ministry directors) have an obligation to carefully examine any past divorce and/or remarriage in any ministry position within the local church. A person who desires to be considered for one of these positions needs to be willing to allow the Management Team to inquire discreetly about the candidate's previous marriage experience. The team will then carefully and compassionately determine whether the individual is to be considered for the position.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

It is our attempt to state as clearly as possible our understanding of the Biblical position on marriage, divorce, separation, remarriage, and leadership. However, we too understand that gray areas exist in discussions of this nature e.g. emotional, physical, and verbal abuse and while not addressed directly by Scripture may be considered in membership and leadership questions that arise as the result of a divorce and/or remarriage. Further, it is our desire to speak the truth in love. It is our hope this position paper will lead us toward grace and away from a critical and judgmental spirit.

ADDENDUM: Pastoral concerns and guidelines

1. Grace Place pastors will approach those considering marriage, divorce, and remarriage, with compassion and respect regardless of the circumstances.
2. Grace Place pastors must make a clear presentation of the biblical principles involved to those seeking counsel regarding marriage, divorce, or remarriage.
3. The pastors are responsible for helping individuals wishing to be married process the decision biblically and rationally.
4. Thorough premarital counseling is required if a Grace Place pastor is officiating the wedding.
5. A pastor shall refrain from officiating at a wedding when he is aware that the couple has been refused by another Grace Place pastor.
6. Whenever possible, rather than divorce, reconciliation and restoration is ideal.
7. People who have divorce and/or remarriage in their history need special consideration and counsel if they desire an official ministry assignment with Grace Place.
8. No document, such as this position statement, can address all possible scenarios. In the final analysis we affirm God has taken the initiative to save humanity by grace alone, received by faith alone – plus nothing (Ephesians 2:4-9).