

Marriage: A Profound Mystery

In Ephesians 5 the Apostle Paul reveals the meaning of the “profound mystery” of the one-flesh union (marriage) by “saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (verse 32). Paul uncovers the spiritual purpose of marriage as a type of the covenant relationship between Jesus (the bridegroom) and the Church (his bride); biblical marriage functions as an earthly picture of a spiritual reality.

In other words, the institution of marriage has a high calling. Unfortunately, though, divorce runs rampant in the United States and is more common than it should be in our churches. In order to give biblical counsel on the weighty topic of divorce and remarriage, we searched the Scriptures and viewed existing resources from other local churches. On March 5, 2020, the elders at Crossing adopted the attached policy (written by Tenth Presbyterian Church) as one with which we agree and very closely align.

The attached is intended to convey our interpretation of the Scriptures where they speak about divorce and remarriage. There is one addition to our position that was not specifically stated, but needed to be added in order to allow our pastors the freedom to officiate weddings according to their convictions:

When one of our pastors holds to a more conservative position than the church on divorce and remarriage, he is not expected to violate his personal convictions. He should feel free to turn down opportunities to officiate at wedding ceremonies that contradict his personal beliefs. In such circumstances the pastor is not to speak of the church standards in any disrespectful way.¹

¹ Calvary Baptist Church Policy on Divorce and Remarriage, adopted by Calvary elders 7/10/18

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

Principles Governing Their Practice

Part 1 -- Biblical

1. Marriage is a divine institution (Genesis 2:18-22; Matthew 19:4-6).
2. Christians must enter into and conduct their marriages according to the rules for marriage set down in Scripture.
3. Marriage is intended by God to be permanent (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:6).
4. When one of the partners dies the remaining partner may remarry (Romans 7:2).
5. The only possible biblical ground for dissolving a marriage of two Christians is the "exception clause" of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 ("except for fornication").

This means either:

- a. Unchastity discovered in the wife during the betrothal period or at the time of the marriage in which case the deceived husband may put his wife away, that is, declare the marriage to be null and void, or
- b. Adultery committed after the marriage has taken place in which case the husband (or wife) may seek a divorce.

In the first case, the principle of permanent marriage is uncompromised since there has been no true marriage and no true divorce occurs.

In the second case, divorce and a remarriage would be permitted, but even in this case the highest course would be to save the marriage (Hosea).

At Tenth Presbyterian Church we are committed to doing everything possible to save marriages. We are not convinced that adultery is the correct interpretation of the Matthew passages. We believe that the first interpretation does greater justice to the meaning of the Greek word (*porneia*) and is in fuller harmony with the teaching of Scripture as a whole, including the teaching of Jesus, who always heightened rather than lessened the Old Testament standards. Nonetheless, because the second interpretation has been the majority view within the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, including the Presbyterian Church in America, and because scholars we respect do interpret the passages to mean adultery, we are willing to view adultery as a valid biblical ground for divorce for the purposes of dealing with divorced and/or remarried persons at Tenth Presbyterian Church, except that our pastors will generally decline to remarry Christians who have been divorced as Christians.

6. In no case does Scripture permit divorce (and remarriage) between Christians on any grounds other than adultery.
7. In the case of one Christian partner leaving the other Christian partner for any cause other than adultery, he or she is to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to the abandoned partner (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11).
8. If a Christian is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever is willing to continue living with the Christian, the Christian is not to seek a separation or divorce (1 Corinthians 7:12-14).
9. If a Christian is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever chooses to leave the Christian, the Christian is free to permit the separation and/or resulting divorce (1 Corinthians 7:15).

Part 2 -- Practical

1. Christian marriages, the only kind that are to be performed at Tenth Presbyterian Church, are by definition to be between two professing Christians only.
2. If a Christian has been married and divorced before becoming a Christian, this past history is not to be considered a barrier to a second marriage to a Christian.
3. If a Christian has been married as a Christian and then divorced, this past history is not in itself to be considered a barrier to him or her becoming a member of the church in good standing.
4. If a Christian has been married as a Christian and then divorced on the grounds of adultery by the other party, according to the second interpretation of the "exception clause" (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9), he or she may be remarried.
5. If a Christian has been married as a Christian and then divorced on any grounds other than adultery, he or she may not be remarried but is to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to the other partner.
6. If a Christian has been married as a Christian, divorced and then remarried, this past history is not in itself to be considered a barrier to him or her (or his or her new spouse) becoming a member of the church in good standing.
7. Divorce between Christians on any grounds other than adultery and/or remarriage by such divorced Christians, while not barring them from membership in the church, are sufficient to bar them from serving as church officers until there has been adequate time to show their genuine repentance and change from the life patterns that led to the breaking of their original marriage vows. At this point they may be considered to be above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2), since no sin is beyond the cleansing and sanctifying work of Christ's atoning sacrifice (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
8. Divorce and remarriage on non-biblical grounds, while sinful acts, are not necessarily more sinful than other sinful acts, and those caught up in them are to be treated with grace, care and compassion.

Approved by Session, July 30, 1991
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