



# HIGHLANDS CHURCH

## Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

### **What Highlands believes about Marriage:**

Marriage is a gift created by God and is to be between one man and one woman as described in Gen. 2:24-25 (See Highlands statement on Marriage and Sexuality) and is meant to be a permanent lifetime relationship (Mark 10:1-12). Marriages are designed by God to be a picture of Jesus' relationship with His Church. (Jesus confirmed this model of marriage. Matt. 19:4-5.) This is why believers are to be equally yoked with another believer who is seeking to love and obey Jesus (2 Cor. 6:14).

Husbands and wives are to submit to "one another out of reverence to Christ." (Eph. 5:21). In mutual submission to Jesus and each other, Husbands are called to lead in love as Christ led and loved the Church and wives are to submit to their own husbands (Eph. 5:22-23, 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Sin in a marriage relationship causes damage to God's design, but that damage can be healed with God's help. God desires holiness and spiritual maturity to be displayed in our marriages and has the best interest of His children in mind. Highlands church promotes faith, repentance, and the well being of those in a marriage relationship through the support and encouragement by the body of believers at Highlands.

### **What Highlands believes about Divorce:**

Highlands counsels married couples to stay married and seek repentance and reconciliation. However, there are situations in which God allows for divorce. When a divorce occurs, it is always the result of sin from one or both of the couple. However, divorce itself is not always sinful.

God allowed for divorce through Moses due to the hardness of men's hearts (Matt 19:3-9; Deut. 24:1-4). Jesus answers the Pharisees' question on divorce stating that marriage is to be permanent but gives an exception in the case of sexual immorality, which is any form of illicit sexual intercourse.

Another biblical basis for permitting divorce is abandonment by an unbelieving spouse who no longer desires to live with his or her believing spouse in marriage (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Because "the brother or sister is not enslaved." (1 Cor. 7:15) and is therefore no longer bound to the marriage, the abandoned believer may divorce.

1 Cor. 7:10-11 commands believers to stay married, but indicates that it may be possible for a wife to separate from the marriage. However, 1 Cor. 7:10-11 also commands the wife to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. This also leaves the husband who *'should not divorce his wife'* with the biblical command to

stay unmarried or seek reconciliation. 1 Cor. 7:10-11 does not in itself address remarriage and does not show relationship to other biblical exceptions that allow for remarriage.

Highlands believes in the miraculous transforming power of Jesus and thus by remaining unmarried the woman leaves open the possibility of God providing in miraculous ways.

### **What Highlands believes about Remarriage:**

When divorce is not biblically allowed, any subsequent remarriage (to someone other than the original spouse) results in biblical infidelity. There are some biblical situations where remarriage is possible. Christians who have been remarried following an unbiblical divorce should remain with their current spouse but follow the biblical admonition to repent and be forgiven of their past sins and make whatever amends are necessary.

We acknowledge that the subject of divorce and remarriage is biblically challenging in its interpretation and requires prayerful discernment and often a team of wise biblically based counselors is beneficial in its personal application. In all instances, it includes complexity and nuance that cannot be over-simplified into a blanket policy, but requires prudence, patience and pastoral sensibility.

God allows remarriage in the following circumstances:

1. An unbelieving spouse abandoning a believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:15). "In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved." The Apostle Paul says you are to stay in the marriage if an unbelieving spouse wants to stay. His desire is illustrated in Hosea 1-3. Hosea redeems his wife after her adulterous lifestyle. God would always want us to repent and restore our marriage.
2. Death of a spouse (1 Cor. 7:39). You are no longer bound.
3. Sexual immorality (Mat. 5:31-32 and Mat. 19). You are free to remarry.

If one or more of these apply, you would be free to remarry. As a believer, if you remarry outside of these exceptions, Church discipline would be applied (Mat. 18:15-17).

If you were married as an unbeliever and got a divorce and since have come to know Jesus as your Savior, according to 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come." If all things are new, then all things are new in Christ. Reconciliation to their prior spouse if both have remained unmarried should be sought if circumstance allows but the new believer is free to marry as a new creation.

## **Key Biblical Texts on Divorce and Remarriage: 1 Corinthians 7, Matthew 5, and Matthew 19**

### **1 Corinthians 7**

Verses ten and eleven concern Christian married couples and the issue of divorce. Verses ten to sixteen are a call to the commitment to marriage.

#### **Christian Married Couples - vv. 10-11**

*<sup>10</sup>To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup>(but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife."*

As in other passages concerning marriage, the biblical charge in verse 10 is to not separate (The word "separate" means *leave, send away, separated from*). However, Verse 11 states that if a situation arises where the wife decides that she must separate (or obtain a legal separation or divorce), she is then commanded to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her former husband.

- **PRINCIPLE:**

God's ideal is for Christians to work through their marriage problems.

- **APPLICATION:**

Good counsel is always free from bias and prejudice. Many so-called "hopeless" situations come around to a wholesome marriage. God's ultimate goal for marriage is not happiness but the development of holy character – a character that is formed into the image of Christ. Love is something that can be renewed and by remaining unmarried the possibility of reconciliation continues to be available. God can miraculously change a person's heart and actions which then would allow for reconciliation.

#### **Unbelieving spouses - vv. 12-16:**

*<sup>12</sup>To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup>If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup>For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. <sup>15</sup>But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. <sup>16</sup>For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

Verses 12-13:

Now Paul turns to the subject of Christians married to non-Christians (7:12-14). The phrase "not the Lord" does not deny the inspiration of Scripture but only indicates that the Lord did not speak to this issue while He was on earth. Jesus never gave a total exposition on divorce while He lived on earth. Paul argues that marriage to a non-believer does not change the nature of marriage so, when people become Christians, they are to remain married. If the non-believer wants to remain married, then the believer should remain married. Continuance in marriage

depends on the willingness of the non-Christian to continue the marriage. Christians should not divorce against the will of the unbeliever.

- **PRINCIPLE:**  
As a general principle, a Christian is not to divorce the unbelieving partner.
- **APPLICATION:**  
An unequal yoke to a non-believer can be frustrating, but it is not grounds for divorce. The believer is not to take the initiative in divorcing the unbeliever. 1 Peter 3:1-2, says, <sup>1</sup>“Likewise, wives be subject to your own husbands, so the even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by conduct of their wives, <sup>2</sup>when they see your respectful and pure conduct”

Verse 14:

Paul argues that staying with the unbelieving partner “is made holy” by that partner. By marrying a Christian, the non-Christian and their family have a set-apart or special exposure to the Christian life and the possibility of becoming a Christian. There is a blessing by being married to a believer. There is also a great opportunity for children to come to Christ. If there was a divorce and the children went with the unbelieving partner, then they would not have exposure to the Christian or the gospel.

- **PRINCIPLE:**  
A new dynamic works in the life of a non-Christian married to a Christian.
- **APPLICATION:**  
Far from the idea that the Christian married to a non-Christian will be defiled, the non-Christian has a great opportunity to become a Christian. Also, children of mixed marriages have a much greater opportunity to come to Christ if the Christian remains with the non-Christian.

Verses 15-16:

If a non-Christian divorces his or her Christian spouse, there is nothing that the believer can do to change the situation. The phrase “is not enslaved” means that the believer is free to remarry. Although God allows divorce and remarriage in this situation, He calls the partners to a peaceful relationship. If the unbelieving spouse wants to stay in the marriage, the believer should remain married to influence the unbeliever for Christ. In the event of a divorce, the possibility of leading one’s unbelieving spouse to the Lord is very difficult.

- **PRINCIPLE:**  
Christians are free to remarry if their non-believing spouse divorces them.
- **APPLICATION:**  
Marriage is a mutual, not a unilateral, relationship (Eph. 5:21). It is God’s design for marriage that, under whatever conditions partners find themselves, they are to live in a peaceful relationship. Desertion (or abandonment) by an unbeliever is like adultery because both disrupt the marriage tie. The essence of marriage is union, but adultery and desertion by

an unbeliever break that union. If desertion is final, the marriage dissolves and the believer is free to remarry.

Abandonment by an unbelieving spouse is traditionally viewed as the spouse leaving the relationship and home. Of interest on this point, the legal system recognizes "abandonment" as both an actual abandonment from the home, and "constructive" abandonment. This latter happens, for example, when an unbelieving spouse abandons all aspects of the marriage but lives at home for financial reasons, while ignoring the spouse in all other respects. The legal definition is not controlling over Scripture; but we may observe some wisdom from this legal distinction. There may be rare cases where a spouse abandons a spouse in all respects, such as emotional and financial support and intimacy. In some cases, a spouse may have constructively abandoned a spouse, without actually leaving the marital home, thereby meeting the biblical standard of abandonment.

## **Mathew 5**

In Matthew 5:31-32 Jesus gives the ground for divorce.

*<sup>31</sup>"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' <sup>32</sup>But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."*

The phrase "It was also said" is a reference to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The Mosaic Law allowed divorce and did not regard those divorced and remarried as committing adultery. Women did not have the right of divorce in Israel but men did. God provided the "Certificate of Divorce" to protect the wife from reckless and capricious divorce and likely subsequent economic distress. For example, most women did not have a source of income and being divorced might have forced some women to turn to prostitution to sustain themselves. That certificate did not allow a man to send his wife out the door without legal rights. Under this bill, the husband could not remarry his wife again nor could she remarry him.

This provision was a concession by God to the sinfulness of men. Divorce in Israel was a domestic matter and not something that went to court. A man could simply divorce his wife by giving her a document in writing. Having this document, a woman could marry again.

- **PRINCIPLE:**  
Divorce is concession to the sinfulness of man, not a primary ideal of God.
- **APPLICATION:**

Divorce is a concession by God to the sinfulness of man. God's ideal is the stability of permanence in marriage. People who go through divorce experience greater pain than they could have imagined. Their primary thought is to relieve their present pain in marriage, but they only find greater pain in divorce—not to mention more serious social issues such as the harm their children suffer in the loss of a parent.

## **Matthew 19**

Verses one through six concern the permanency of marriage. Verses ten to twelve discuss that some have the capacity for singleness and are better off remaining unmarried. J

### ***Permanency of Marriage - vv. 1-6***

*<sup>1</sup>Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. <sup>2</sup>And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. <sup>3</sup>And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" <sup>4</sup>He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup>and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup>So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

Divorce was widespread in Jewish culture at this time. The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus on a theological issue in order to undermine His authority. There were two camps in Israel on divorce. The Hillel group believed that a male could divorce his wife for any reason. The Shammai group asserted that a person could divorce only because of sexual fault. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to take sides in the debate.

Jesus' position was closer to Shammai than to Hillel. Marriage in Jesus' eyes was bound with creation. It did not come from some issue after creation. God's original intention was to make the sexes different. Marriage is a divine institution and God intended it to be permanent. Marriage is a union of persons—both a sexual and a relational union. Husband and wife are indivisible except through death or legitimate divorce. The word "separate" means divorce. It is not God's will that man break the marriage bond.

- **PRINCIPLE:**

God's design for marriage is permanence.

- **APPLICATION:**

God's design for marriage is "till death do us part." It is a divine institution. God designed husband and wife to complement each other. To destroy a marriage is to break God's design.

### ***Some have a Special Capacity for Singleness - vv. 10-12***

*<sup>10</sup>The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."<sup>11</sup> But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this*

*saying, but only those to whom it is given. <sup>12</sup> For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."*

The disciples question that, based on Jesus' view of separation, it would be better not to marry in the first place. Remaining unmarried is not the general rule but for some it is a better choice. Singleness has its own problems and is given only to those committed to celibacy. Jesus Himself never married. Not many people can make space for singleness in their lives. A single life can be very lonely.

- **PRINCIPLE:**  
Marriage takes self-sacrifice and self-giving to be satisfying.
- **APPLICATION:**  
Solid marriage rests on permanent and unconditional commitment to one's spouse. Romance may fade but commitment should not. Only the committed marriage is an enduring entity. There is no sound reason for avoiding a committed marriage.

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