

A Statement on Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage Bucks County Community Church

This statement, finalized by the Elders of Bucks County Community Church on February 4th, 2019, is designed to supplement our previously written doctrinal position on marriage. The goal of this statement is to clearly present the guidelines that the Bible gives regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage; to encourage obedience to those guidelines; and to provide guidance for teaching, preaching, counseling, the officiating of marriages, and the implementation of church discipline.

Preamble

This document represents hours of discussion, study and prayer corporately and individually on behalf of our elders over the course of approximately 18 months. It has been and remains our desire to honor our call to shepherd the flock by proving ourselves as workmen unashamed, handling accurately the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15).

This being said, we acknowledge that there are several under our watch-care who have traversed these choppy waters and have found themselves feeling stranded, abandoned, alone and confused. Marriage can be difficult and sometimes even seem unbearable. With this understanding, it is not our desire to add to the pain that our sin causes in marriage but to give direction that honors God by upholding His standard for marriage as it is designed to reflect His nature and beauty. In so doing, we will be counter cultural because culture has drifted so far from God's ideals that even the church has lost its moorings and lacks the creditability to direct people back to God's holy standard.

In every situation we will be an advocate for the preservation of every marriage. At Bucks County Community Church (Bucks Church), there are several who have been divorced and remarried. Some among our body will discover that their past actions were outside of scriptural boundaries and frankly, sinful. Consequently, they will find that those actions and current circumstances stand in contradiction to this statement. If that be the case, we are not seeking to discipline past sins, but simply encourage a repentant spirit so that they may be found to be a member in good standing and seeking to honor God with their life.

It is never our desire to add burden upon strife but our first priority is to honor God's establishment of marriage as permanent in this life as God gives us breath.

Summary

The basic findings of the Elders of Bucks County Community Church on the issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage are as follows:

- Marriage was instituted by God and is a lifelong covenant made before God between a man and a woman.
- Divorce is not a part of God's original design for marriage.
- Both on account of man's sinfulness and as a protection of the innocent party, God permits divorce in the situations of adultery and desertion.
- For believers, reconciliation should be the first and best option.
- Remarriage is permitted after the death of a spouse and in cases of a biblically-justified divorce. The result of remarriage after a divorce that is not biblically justified is adultery.
- It is better to stay in a marriage, even if entered into after a non-biblical divorce, than to dissolve it.

Discussion

The biblical foundation for Bucks County Community Church's position on the issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage is as follows:

I. Marriage

1. **Marriage was created by God for the joining of one man and one woman. (Gen 2:22-24; Matt 19:4-6).** Marriage is a divine act in which God joins husband and wife together, through both covenant and consummation, as one flesh, and this one-flesh union should not be broken.
2. **A believer may only marry another believer (2 Cor 6:14-15; 1 Cor 7:39).** In cases where a believer is married to an unbeliever, he or she should remain faithfully committed to his or her spouse in the hopes that the unbelieving spouse may one day be saved (1 Cor 7:12-14, 16).

II. Divorce

1. **Divorce is a violation of God's purpose for the unity of marriage (Matt 19:3-6).** Jesus teaches that divorce has been permitted due to man's sin (Matt 19:7-8) and that it may serve as a protection of the innocent party (Matt 19:9). Nevertheless, divorce brings harmful consequences to the husband and wife and their children (Mal 2:13-16).

2. **Biblically, divorce is allowed in two situations: adultery and desertion.**
 - a. **Adultery - If the believer's spouse has committed adultery, then he or she is permitted to pursue divorce (Matt 19:9).** Many English translations of Matthew 19:9 use the word sexual immorality instead of adultery because Jesus was actually referring to a broad range of illicit sexual activities, including those listed in Leviticus 18. Even when one's spouse has sinned against him or her through sexual immorality, divorce is never required, encouraged, or even recommended; however, it is permitted since the adulterous spouse has violated the marriage covenant by breaking the one-flesh union. Before pursuing divorce, a believer should seriously consider Jesus' teachings on forgiveness (Matt 18:21-22).
 - b. **Desertion – If the believer is married to an unbeliever who chooses to willfully abandon the marriage, the believer may consent to divorce (1 Cor 7:15).** When an unbelieving spouse abandons the marriage covenant, the believing spouse is not called to try to fight to bring him or her back or to wait for him or her to return.
3. **In some cases in which divorce is not permitted, a temporary, physical separation may be necessary.** For example, when physical abuse is present in the home, it may be necessary for a spouse to temporarily separate for the sake of his or her own safety and/or for the safety of children. Protecting and preserving the welfare of the vulnerable is a value that permeates Scripture (Ex 20:13; Psa 82:3-4; 1 Tim 5:8).

III. Remarriage

1. **In situations involving the death of a spouse, a believer may pursue a new marriage to another believer (1 Cor 7:39; Rom 7:2-3).** While the marriage covenant is designed to be permanent for a lifetime (Gen 2:23-24, Matt 19:4-6), it is not an eternal covenant and is ultimately ended when one of the spouses dies (Mark 12:25).
2. **In the two situations in which divorce is biblically permitted, the believer is also permitted to remarry (Matt 19:9; 1 Cor 7:15).** In the case of desertion, by granting the believing spouse permission to accept the unbelieving spouse's leaving, the Apostle Paul is essentially granting the freedom to pursue a new marriage since in his day permission to divorce presumed permission to remarry.¹

¹ Mishnah Gittin 9:3

- 3. If a believer is divorced for any other reason, then he or she should either remain single or be reconciled to his or her spouse (1 Cor 7:10-11).** When a believer is divorced from his or her spouse without biblical grounds, the marriage covenant remains intact. A married couple may be legally divorced in the eyes of the government, and yet still be bound in covenant to one another in God's eyes. Therefore, the only options available to either spouse are to remain separated or to be reconciled because a new marriage would be an act of adultery (Mark 10:11-12).
- 4. However, if a divorced believer's former spouse has either committed adultery after the divorce or has died, then he or she is permitted to remarry regardless of the original grounds for divorce (Matt 19:9; Rom 7:2-3).** This does not mean that a new marriage will be wise or beneficial; rather, it simply means that the believer is free to enter a new marriage covenant because the former covenant has been dissolved.