

## 1.1 Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Policy

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It is recognized that the church is in a unique position within the community and is responsible before God for maintaining an example of holy living. Thus, we acknowledge quality of relationships, and in particular those relationships found in family life, as an integral part of our witness in the world. The lifestyle of the Christian is meant to provide both rebuke to a culture drifting away from high moral standards and a source of hope for those who want more from life than what our cultural world offers.

Because of this the Pastors and board of elders have formulated this document to give instruction to the congregation on matters of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

#### **Biblical Teaching on Marriage**

1. The foundation for a strong marriage is based on a proper view of ourselves (Romans 12:3) and understanding how God views us (Genesis 1:31; 2 Peter 1:3-11; John 14:6).

#### **With this foundation we can:**

- a. Relate to others with emotional maturity (Mk. 7:21, 22; Col. 3:5-15; Gal. 5:17-19, 22; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8). This is especially important in the marriage relationship -- the most intimate of all relationships. Because it is so intimate it has great potential for both joy and pain. Ecclesiastes makes clear that God intends that vows be kept (5:6-7), not just with the letter of the law (avoiding divorce) but also with the intention of the law (to honor, cherish, nourish, love, etc. See Malachi 2:7-16 and Genesis 2:24).
  - b. Learn to overcome our weaknesses (1 Peter 1:18, 19).
  - c. Develop good communication skills. The first place for learning to communicate is in prayer and then in biblical teaching for resolving disagreements (Ephesians 4:25-32). Open and loving communication also helps marriage partners discover their similarities and differences, their strengths and weaknesses, and weave these together into positive patterns of interdependence.
2. God's plan for marriage provides companionship, partnership, and oneness (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33). The plan includes a binding public covenant or commitment entered into willingly and expressed in the vows a husband and wife make to each other. An exclusive union which the Bible describes as becoming "one flesh."

Neither of these two parts of God's plan, in isolation from the other, is sufficient for the formation of a marriage. Marriage is neither a bare legal contract nor a private commitment of love. Marriage is always a cord that ties a man and a woman together with these two strands.

The principle of "one flesh" includes many things, but primary among these is unity of faith. The original plan for marriage was given before Adam and Eve fell into sin. Sin ruptured their relationship and has negatively affected all marriage relationships since that time. God's point of view on contractual relationships is based on oneness of spiritual purpose and is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (based on Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 32:38; Ezekiel 20:34,41, 37:27; Is. 52:11; and 2 Samuel 7:8, 14).

### **Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage**

1. God intends marriage to be a lifelong contract (Genesis 2:24; Matt 19:2-9). This relationship is meant to reflect God's relationship with the church, which is unbreakable, and therefore Christian marriages are to be maintained until the death of one of the partners (Romans 7:2-3; Matt. 19:6; Mark 9:10).
2. Divorce is not commended or encouraged in the Bible (e.g. Mal 2:16; Mark 10:9; Luke 16:18). God hates divorce.
3. Divorce for Christians is permitted (at least conceded) for two reasons:
  - a. Where one partner has committed sexual sin and is unwilling to repent and live faithfully with his/her partner (Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9).
  - b. Where one partner is not a Christian and permanently leaves the Christian partner (1 Corinthians 7:10-16). If the unbelieving partner does not abandon the believing partner, the believing partner is not normally at liberty to initiate the divorce.
4. The Christian who has been divorced (in terms of number 3 above) has the right and freedom to remarry if he/she has diligently sought reconciliation without success (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:27-28a).

If there are some biblical grounds for permitting Christians to be divorced and remarried, how much more should we be cautious about condemning people divorced before they became Christians. Yet no one should take Christian teaching on marriage and divorce lightly. Invariably, divorce is the product of human sinfulness, of one kind or another. We cannot pretend that it is pleasing to God (even though there are situations where it may be the lesser of two evils). However, the real issue is whether there is forgiveness and cleansing of past sins.

### **Biblical Teaching on God's Grace and Forgiveness**

The Gospel is clear in showing that there is complete forgiveness of past sins for those who come to Christ (e.g. Romans 8:1; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). They are forgiven and cleansed, even though the effects of those past sins might continue into the present.

Because God forgives all our sins when we come to the cross of Jesus, we also should forgive others who become Christians, and not hold their earlier sins against them (Mark 11:25).

By forgiving a divorced person the Christian does not encourage divorce, but acknowledges God's forgiving and changing work in a person's life. The life of the apostle Paul shows God's forgiveness and life-changing work. "I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life" (1 Tim 1:16).

This truth and the power of the gospel must be shown in our teaching and witness in the Village Church of Barrington. It is to be shown in our forgiveness and love to those who have come to God in repentance and faith. The person's testimony can be one of God's grace and power to change them rather than become a temptation for others to do as they did.

**Divorce as it relates to leadership in the Village Church of Barrington**

God's grace has covered the sin of those who have trusted in Christ and repented of their sin, but their sin can still disqualify them from leadership. This is because the effects of sin may persist despite forgiveness and cleansing. The Bible is concerned largely with the present qualities and attitudes of a leader rather than their past life. The qualifications of elders and deacons given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 relate to the character qualities of the person.

The most powerful modeling is how a leader is living now. A consistent family life in the present is a stronger witness than a marriage break-up that occurred in the distant past.

The requirement that an elder be the "husband of one wife" concerns present faithfulness to one's wife (and also rules out polygamy). Sexual sin is a temptation for those in leadership, and they must be beyond reproach in this area. This does not mean that they have to be married or that they cannot have been remarried after being widowed or divorced in the past.

In terms of qualifications for leadership, it is not just a matter of whether the person has repented of past sin, but whether he has matured in this area of weakness (Matt. 3:8). If there is concern that the same problems would recur in the person's life then the Village Church of Barrington would not allow the person to hold a position of leadership. Years of consistent living are necessary to get to the point of leadership.

**Statement of Policy**

We believe that we should be very concerned that everyone in the congregation of the Village Church of Barrington demonstrates an upright character in all areas of their life, while at the same time recognizing the path along which God is bringing each person to maturity.

God's grace needs to be demonstrated in the policy of the Village Church of Barrington as well as in our personal attitudes and teaching. To automatically disqualify a person for past sin negates God's grace and God's power to change people. To disqualify a person for divorce and not murder or theft, etc., is to say either that this sin is worse than others or that it has more ongoing effects than others. Neither can be supported from Scripture.

**The Village Church of Barrington agrees to the following way of expressing the biblical teachings as we consider their application:**

1. The church will perform marriages only where both persons show evidence of being a believer.
2. We recognize that a divorced person who divorced before becoming a Christian is not automatically disqualified from a staff or leadership position. We believe all of one's past sin is fully cleansed when we turn to Christ in repentance and faith and the grace of God can equip such persons for leadership.
3. We also recognize that sometimes a Christian can be hurt deeply by a divorce when his or her partner has committed adultery and spoiled the marriage or when his or her unbelieving partner refuses to continue in the marriage and insists on divorce. By the grace of God such Christians can repent of their part in the marriage breakdown. Through the work of the Holy Spirit they can change their attitude and strengthen the weaknesses that were revealed in their broken marriage. The Scriptures above suggest they are free to remarry. In such cases

the grace of God may also equip such persons for leadership. The church will require a waiting period, which will vary according to each situation, before remarriage will be considered. This waiting period may also include the requirement that the individual(s) concerned receive counseling.

4. If divorced and remarried persons who come into one of the categories outlined above (paragraph 2 or 3) apply for a staff position at VCB, then the Elder Board will particularly consider whether:
  - a. They demonstrate evidence of forgiveness and repentance for their part in the marriage breakdown.
  - b. They demonstrate Christ-like character, a stable marriage (if remarried) and consistent testimony over a significant period of time.
  - c. Their church (if other than VCB) recognizes and agrees that they are fit for a responsible position of service within the church.
  - d. The board of elders would treat any such application seriously, and would look for confirmation of the grace of God equipping them for a role at VCB.

#### **Special Circumstances**

1. **Living together before marriage**  
The couple, where no children are involved, will be required to separate for a time before being married. However, the Pastors will determine whether specific circumstances make this appropriate. There will also be a written covenant which they will sign indicating the process and outcome of dealing with the sin of fornication and the promise to remain chaste from that time until they actually marry.
2. **Pregnancy before marriage**  
Fornication, even where it does result in pregnancy, is not automatic grounds for marriage. Special counseling should be received to ascertain whether marriage is wise. Where the couple desire to become married, counseling will be given to encourage repentance and deal with issues of trust that will rise after marriage that could cause the marriage to self-destruct.
3. **Remarriage where the divorced partner has remained single**  
If adultery was the primary cause of the divorce, then the divorced partner is free to remarry. Before divorce takes place, reconciliation is the ideal unless the one who committed adultery is adamant about pursuing divorce. Further, where reconciliation is truly attempted yet fails to take place within a minimum time frame of a year, the divorced partner is free to seek marriage elsewhere. Again, the ideal would be to wait until the person who committed adultery becomes married again.
4. **Physical, emotional, verbal abuse**  
As pastors and elders we are sensitive to situations involving physical and other types of abuse. Our first priority is always the safety of the person being abused. We will seek to give help, support, and counsel to the couple. In some cases church discipline may be necessary.
5. **Internet adultery**  
Adultery always begins in the mind, but in this case it is difficult to determine if the guilty person would put action to their thoughts and desires. Divorce is never

commanded by the Bible as a response to adultery, whatever the type. It is always better to work hard at saving the marriage if both partners are willing to work on it.

6. Pornography  
As Point 5 above.
7. Homosexuality  
If the person is not willing to repent, sexual sin has taken place and divorce is allowed but not commanded.

### **Procedure When Considering Remarriage**

#### **Procedure for Approval to Remarry:**

1. The application for a remarriage begins with meeting specific requirements:
  - a. If the person is new to the church, he/she must have attended for one year regularly (75% or 3 out of every 4 Sundays) in order to be considered.
  - b. If the person was divorced while at the Village Church of Barrington we strongly urge a one-year waiting period after the divorce before beginning to date anyone.
  - c. If the person is considering dating again, and has exhausted attempts to reconcile, he/she should request that the elders review their situation to consider if remarriage is a possibility.
2. The review for a remarriage will include the following steps:
  - a. A review of the situation that led to the divorce, and the steps taken for reconciliation.
  - b. If the person making the request attended another church at the time of the divorce, the elders or pastors will contact the pastor of the other church to make sure every effort was made to save the marriage.
  - c. The divorced spouse will be contacted if possible to see if there is any possibility for reconciliation.
  - d. The situation will be considered by the elders, and a recommendation and/or permission to remarry will be given.

#### **If approval is given by the elders:**

1. A pastor will meet with the person concerned and agree to counsel him/her. Counseling must start a minimum of 6 months prior to the wedding date.
2. A pastor will also need to agree to marry the couple.
3. Calendar and wedding request forms must be completed.
4. The building fee deposit will be required.

