

Divorce and Remarriage

A positional statement by the elders of Calvary Bible Church
Fort Worth, Texas.

Adopted by the elder board January, 2003

1. It is clear from the word of God that a believer must not marry an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-15)
2. Since the bond of the marriage covenant is broken by death (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39), the remarriage of the widowed spouse is permissible if the union is made with another believer.
3. Divorce is permitted as a last resort when a spouse deserts the relationship, or commits unrepentant adultery by fornication (Mat. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:11; 1 Cor. 7:15). We also recognize that divorce may be necessary when a spouse becomes dangerously abusive.

Please understand that to this point *we are not making a statement about remarriage*. Rather, we simply want to acknowledge that there are times when the Bible permits the severing of the marriage covenant due to hard-hearted, unrepentant sin. It must be stressed that we do not assume divorce to necessarily be a permanent end to a relationship. Even after long periods of separation, repentance may still occur making lifelong reconciliation a beautiful reality (provided neither spouse has remarried).

It must be stressed that forgiveness and reconciliation between sinning spouses is preferable to divorce even when something as terrible as adultery has occurred (Mat. 18:21-22).

4. The remarriage of the guilty (i.e. offending) spouse may be viewed as permanently severing the marriage so that the unmarried spouse whose behavior did not biblically justify being divorced, is free to remarry in the Lord (Mat. 19:9).

Before any of the elders of Calvary would remarry a brother or sister in such circumstances, we would need assurance that the offended party has confessed all known sin in the divorce, and has made significant progress in overcoming any destructive behaviors and attitudes that may have contributed to problems in the previous marriage.

In light of Paul's admonitions in 1 Cor. 7, we would also affirm the goodness and freedom for ministry available to those who would choose a life of singleness. Those who are able to remain single without constantly battling the burning power of sexual lust may do so for the glory of God. On the other hand, if such a one chooses to remarry, "he has not sinned" (1 Cor. 7:28)

5. In such case as the offending party does not remarry, it may be possible for the aggrieved party to remarry in the Lord anyway. After serious efforts have been made toward reconciliation, the abandoned or irreconcilably offended spouse may, together with the

leadership of the church, come to regard the marriage irreparably broken due to unrepentant, hard-hearted sin and unbelief. Such a step, however, must never be entered into lightly or hastily since the effect of this action is to cut off any possibility of future reconciliation (i.e. remarriage) with the offending spouse.

We realize that this point is often the primary object of contention among those who honestly differ regarding the issues of divorce and remarriage. Nevertheless, we have come to believe that the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes a gracious allowance for remarriage to the offended party. He writes: “*Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or sister is not under bondage in such case, but God has called us to peace*” (1 Corinthians 7:15). And again, “*Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a [new] wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned;*” (7:27-28).

Furthermore, we believe that denying any possibility of remarriage often puts an unwarranted burden on the chastity of the divorced person who may not believe he/she has the gift of chastity (I Corinthians 7:7).

Having said that, however, we wish to make it clear that before such liberty is permitted by the elders of Calvary, we must be unanimously convinced that serious efforts have been made at reconciliation over a significant period of time. Even to the point of eliciting the intervention of the entire church when necessary (Matthew 18:15-20).

6. If two believers divorce for reasons other than adultery by fornication, neither party has the biblical freedom to remarry. They must either reconcile with God and one another or remain single. (Matthew 19:4-9; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 1:9).
7. If a second marriage ends in death or divorce, the widow or widower is *NOT* permitted to return to the first spouse from whom they were previously divorced (Matthew 19:4-9, Deuteronomy 24:1-4).
8. Believers who have divorced and remarried in an *unbiblical* manner will be ineligible for positions of leadership among the ministries of the elders and deacons of the church (1 Timothy 3:2, 12). Other opportunities for ministry are available to those whom the elders believe have genuinely repented of this sin and seek to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

Conclusion:

It is not the intent of this paper to unscramble every conceivable scenario that the elders of Calvary might face. To be sure, there are many possible complications that would be very difficult to unravel in order to establish the appropriate and biblical course of action one should take in life and ministry after the break-up of a marriage. Nevertheless, to this end the elders of every church are called as shepherds of God’s flock.