

*A Position Letter from the Elders at Grace Community Church
Regarding Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*

We confess that Scripture is to be the sufficient guide for Christians in all of life, and thus in marriage. As ordained by God, marriage is:

1. to reflect the relationship between Christ and His church, (Eph 5:22–33)
2. for companionship, (Gen 2:18)
3. for the only right sexual expression, (Heb 13:4; 1 Cor 6:18–20; Prov 5:18–19) and
4. for procreation. (Gen 1:27–28)

Based on biblical testimony, we believe that marriage is a foundational tenet of human society. It is a gift of God, meant to be enjoyed for life, and sacred in its formation.

As expressed in Scripture, Grace Community Church will only sanction marriages which are between:

1. one man and one woman, (1 Tim 3:2,12; Gen 2:18,24)
2. two Christians, (2 Cor 6:14)
3. for life. (Mal 2:14–16)

We recognize that God created humanity in two genders, male and female, and that any deviation from this is an affront to God. Therefore, we will neither endorse nor perform ceremonies for polygamous (1 Tim 3:2,12), homosexual (1 Tim 1:10; Rom 1:26–32; 1 Cor 6:9–10), or unequally yoked relationships (2 Cor 6:14), nor any other ceremony which deviates from one believing man and one believing woman uniting in covenant marriage under God. Similarly, we will not allow the church facilities to be used for such services.

Professing Christians who are in violation of the biblical standards of purity, abstinence, or living above reproach will be expected to repent and live for a period of time in obedience to Scripture to exhibit evidence of repentance prior to being married. (Heb 13:4; Matt 5:27–28; Exod 20:14; Prov 6:25–29; 1 Cor 6:9)

We acknowledge that while God hates divorce, in extremely rare cases it may be permitted. These rare cases are limited to circumstances of sexual infidelity and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (see Matt 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor 7:15), though the biblical response for the offended party is to exhaust every avenue of forgiveness and reconciliation. The Christian, then, seeks to preserve the marriage and does not pursue divorce as their first response. A person who has been divorced under appropriate circumstances within these biblical parameters may be allowed to marry within the church after appropriate counsel with GCC elders. Those divorced outside these rare biblical exceptions thereby remain bound in their original marital covenant, which is a lifelong covenant under God (Deut 24:1–4; Jer 3:1–10; Mal 2:10–17; 1 Cor 7:10–13,15,39; Matt 19:3–12 // Mark 10:2–12; Rom 7:2–3). Divorce is not an unforgivable sin, but marriage is an eternal covenant, and the church must be cautious not to lead an unbiblically

divorced party to engage in sin by remarrying while still in marriage to their first spouse (Matt 19:3–12 // Mark 10:2–12 // Luke 16:18).

While we also acknowledge that civil magistrates can perform marriage ceremonies for some whom we cannot, our position remains that the marriage ceremony is an act of worship and should be regulated by the authority of Scripture. Marriage belongs to God and is rightly observed and exercised by His church.

Specific wedding policies, guidelines, and usage agreements will be discussed with qualified couples during mandated pre-marital counseling with an available elder.

Below we will consider a few examples to help illustrate our position. We recognize that every situation is different, yet some biblical parameters should help guide our thoughts.

(For further, see Matt 19:4–6, Gen 2:24; Deut 24:1–4; Mal 2:16; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7:10–13, 39; and Rom 7:2–3)

- *If I have been unbiblically divorced, should I try to reconcile with my spouse?*
In short, yes. If you have been divorced outside biblical parameters (that is, outside biblical instances of sexual infidelity or abandonment), then you remain married to that spouse in God's eyes and should seek reconciliation if possible.
- *Is there a difference between separation and divorce?*
In our modern use of language, yes. One spouse might separate from the other for a time, especially in cases of physical abuse. In biblical terms, however, *separation* (*chōrizō*) and *divorce* (*aphiēmi*) are often used interchangeably/synonymously (see 1 Cor 7:10–11).
- *If my divorced spouse remarries, am I then free to remarry (since no reconciliation is possible)? In other words, what nullifies a marriage?*
Old Testament precedence is that if there is a divorce without remarriage by either party, there is no biblical dissolution of their marriage. However, if there is a divorce and one of the divorced parties remarries, they should not pursue the original marriage as it has been nullified (see Deut 24:1–4).
Likewise in the New Testament, a new marriage (by a divorced party) invalidates the former marriage (see 1 Cor 7:15,39 and John 4:17). Someone who has been through an unbiblical divorce should not seek remarriage, since their original marriage is still binding and any remarriage would be an act of adultery. The act of remarrying while still biblically married is an act of adultery (Rom 7:2–3), yet once married the new marriage is valid and binding (invalidating the former and freeing the other spouse from the marriage; cf. 1 Cor 7:15).
In applying these biblical principles, we maintain that God hates divorce (Mal 2:16), that those who are married should always seek reconciliation (Matt 19:4–6), and that every situation has mitigating factors that may be considered (John 4:17). Any Christian who has acted unbiblically in these matters should evidence godly contrition and repentance in according with their confession of sin (Phil 2:12).

- *Is divorce allowed in cases of spousal abuse?*

Christians must never condone, ignore, or conceal cases of abuse. When allegations of abuse surface, we as a church are also bound by certain mandatory reporting requirements to notify law enforcement or other authorities in many such cases. Regarding church counsel in such situations, an initial separation from the physically abusive spouse is often beneficial and may be recommended. There is no precedence for including abuse (physical, spiritual, emotional, etc.) as biblical grounds for divorce, yet any ongoing or unrepentant sin (such as spousal abuse) may be an indication of the spiritual state of the offending party. In all such scenarios, we as a church are committed to caring for the suffering party as well as offering counsel concerning biblical repentance and restoration to all involved.

- *What if I was married or divorced as an unbeliever? Does that marriage or divorce still count?*

God recognizes marriage among unbelievers, even if those parties do not recognize the God who created, defined, and instituted marriage (cf. John 4:16–18). A couple who married as unbelievers and are afterward saved are therefore encouraged not to divorce but to honor God in their marriage (1 Cor 7:12–15). If someone was divorced as an unbeliever and has since been saved, the biblical precedent remains to try to reconcile with their spouse if possible and repent of sin where applicable.

- *What does true biblical repentance look like?*

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus sets forth the four-step process of church discipline: (1) tell him his sin alone; (2) take some witnesses; (3) tell the church; and (4) treat him as an outsider.

As far as the welfare of the church is concerned, the purpose of putting the brother out is to protect the purity of the fellowship (1 Cor 5:6), to warn the assembly of the seriousness of sin (1 Tim 5:20), and to give a testimony of righteousness to a watching world. But as far as the welfare of the brother himself is concerned, the purpose of the ostracism is not to punish but to awaken, and it must therefore be done in humble love and never in a spirit of self-righteous superiority (2 Thess 3:15).

When a church has done everything it can to bring a sinning member back to purity of life but is unsuccessful, that individual is to be left to his sin and his shame. If he is truly a Christian, God will not cast him away, but He may allow him to sink still deeper before he becomes desperate enough to turn from his sin. (cf. Tit 3:10; Rom 16:17)

Signed,

the Elders of Grace Community Church
Battle Creek, MI
Soli Deo Gloria