

MARRIAGE, SEPARATION, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

C3 MAGNOLIA POLICY

Marriage

They are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate (Matt. 19:6).

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, He established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ and have found repentance and forgiveness in coming to Christ and sought reconciliation where possible. Others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others, even after professing faith in Christ, may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since repented and received the forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus and sought reconciliation where possible. Whatever the circumstances, we welcome everyone to C3—single, married, and divorced.

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we will devote a significant portion of our preaching and teaching ministry to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide premarital counseling to help couples enter marriage advisedly, and be well-prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in our community group ministry where they can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Heb. 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we expect husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to helping individuals and couples receive biblical counsel and support when they face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that instead can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness, and ongoing discipleship. The desire and intention of all counseling and direction given by C3 elders and pastors will always be toward the permanence, recovery, and restoration of marriages in accordance with faithful obedience to God's revealed word, the Bible.

All couples who desire to be married by a C3 Pastor will agree to abide by the current guidelines, which include but are not limited to: both must be believers in Jesus Christ, they must not be sexually involved and/or living together, and they must submit to premarital counseling offered or approved by C3.

Separation

Scripture teaches God's desire for a marriage to be permanent and holy. (Matthew 19:5-6) In light of this, we believe there is a rare marriage that comes to a point of crisis necessitating a time-limited, structured separation essential towards restoration. It is our stance that no one should remain in a living situation where physical or emotional abuse (described below) is occurring. If obvious danger exists for either a spouse or a child, we support any appropriate means to stop the abuse, including calling the police, church discipline, or other intervention by church or family member. It is also our stance that no one should remain in a living situation where violent emotional abuse, described below, is occurring. Proverbs 22:10. Proverbs 11:9, Proverbs 12:18, Proverbs 18:4 and Matthew 5:21-22 says that even abusive words are similar in their destructive potential as physical abuse can be. Abuse would entail a repetitive pattern of conduct and/or words designed to exert power and control over the other spouse, and/or systematically degrade to the point of "crushing the spirit" of the other spouse. The church elders will help provide a structured plan for this temporary separation purposed for the restoration of each spouse and their marriage.

Divorce

God hates treacherous divorce, (Malachi 2:16) and our church counsels against it. We believe Jesus calls us to have marriages that last a lifetime and to strive wholeheartedly for reconciliation when marital oneness is lacking. This displays the unbreakable covenant commitment between Him and His church. At the same time, we believe God does not hate disciplinary divorce. That is, we believe Scripture permits divorce under the limited circumstances of unrepentant, persistent adultery, or willful abandonment by an unbelieving spouse. (1 Cor. 7:15; Mat. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:11). Additionally, we believe that protracted and unrepentant abuse, whether of physical or emotional, potentially destroys the marriage covenant, like adultery and abandonment. The C3 elders will carefully evaluate all claims of adultery, abandonment, and abuse.

Remarriage

For couples in which either or both have been previously married and then divorced, remarriage at C3 or by a C3 pastor *will be considered on a case-by-case basis* by the Elder Council. Such consideration will be governed by our understanding of God's Word, the Bible, as it pertains to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. This will include consideration of...

- their previous marriage(s) and the circumstances and present standing regarding their divorce(s).
- the resolution of residual issues of right and wrong in the dissolution of the previous marriage(s). These include repentance (where necessary) and forgiveness sought and granted (where appropriate).
- any abiding possibility of restoration of the previous marriage(s).
- marriage of previously married persons may require...

- the couple to meet once with a pastor and/or counselor and/or a small group of elders to explain how God has brought them together and to facilitate their being shepherded.
- the couple to engage in specialized counseling – either at C3 or through a counselor C3 approves -- that addresses the considerations set forth above.

Values

1. Our ultimate value in these matters is **faithful obedience to God & His revealed Word**, the Bible. Immediately we face three challenges: 1) the pervasive brokenness of both our broader culture and of individual lives around us, 2) the prevalence of divorce among believers in our current culture, and 3) varied interpretations of the biblical data on divorce and remarriage.
2. Our second value is to **faithfully serve and minister to** all God brings to C3. This must include addressing the past sins, present scars, and future spiritual health of divorced believers.
3. Our third value is to **faithfully hold the highest possible standards both for marriage and for forgiveness** in the Gospel before our families and especially before the watching and learning eyes of our children and students.
4. Our fourth value is to seek, in all possible cases, **the restoration of broken marriages** before any consideration is given toward remarriage.
5. In addition, we believe that it is appropriate for all single persons to consider whether God has called them and equipped them for a **life of singleness**. Scripture teaches great value in singleness. (1 Corinthians 7:7-8) This option of singleness is too often decried, ignored, or unappreciated by Jesus followers. This should be part of the teaching of C3 and at least an initial portion of the counseling outlined below.

Statement of Guidelines

1. A believer and unbeliever should not marry (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-15).
2. Since death breaks the marriage bond (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39), remarriage is permissible without sin for a believing widow or widower, if the marriage is with another believer.
3. Divorce may be permitted when a spouse decisively and physically deserts the relationship; commits unrepentant adultery; or is guilty of protracted, unrepentant abuse (1 Cor. 7:15; Mat. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:11). We do not believe that divorce must be the last word. Even after long periods of separation and alienation, reconciliation can happen, as when the people of God return to the Lord after periods of waywardness (Hosea 2:14-23). We want to emphasize that the phrase “divorce may be permitted” holds out the possibility that inquiry may reveal that the deserted partner engaged in a wrong behavior that drove the other away, so that a change is called for at home rather than divorce. And we want to stress that forgiveness and reconciliation between sinning spouses is preferable to separation or divorce even where adultery has occurred. This is implied in Matthew

18:21-22, “Then Peter came up and said to him, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.’” (see Luke 17:3-4.)

4. The remarriage of a divorced spouse may be viewed as severing any abiding responsibilities to the former marriage so that the unmarried spouse who was unjustly divorced may be free to remarry a believer (Matthew 19:9), if he or she has confessed all known sin in the divorce, and has made significant progress in overcoming any destructive behaviors and attitudes. All of us urge every member who contemplates remarriage to struggle in prayer and study with all the relevant Scriptures, with the aim of glorifying God through full obedience to His Word, and consider fairly the arguments against remarriage and those for it. Moreover, we want to affirm the goodness and beauty of a life of singleness in God’s service both before marriage and after divorce or death. It is commended in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 11, 32-35, and elevated by the examples of Jesus and Paul and hundreds of great single saints.
5. After serious efforts have been made toward reconciliation, the aggrieved partner referred to in Guideline #3 may, together with the leadership of the church, come to regard the marriage as irreparably broken, and abiding responsibilities to that previous marriage have ceased. In such cases remarriage may be a legitimate step, if taken with serious reckoning that this cuts off all possibility of a reconciliation that God may yet be willing to produce. (See Guideline #7).
6. The aggrieving (guilty) partners referred to in Guideline #3 (who were guilty of abandonment, adultery, or abuse) should repent and be reconciled to God and to their spouses (1 Corinthians 7:11; 1 John 1:9).
7. If a second marriage ends in death or divorce, the widow or widower in this case is not permitted to return to the first spouse in marriage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).
8. The amount of time that has passed and the change in standing from unbeliever to believer does not alter the application of the guidelines for divorce and remarriage. (See Matthew 19:4-6, which highlights the fact that enduring marriages are part of God’s plan for all His human creation, not just His redeemed people.)
9. Even though divorce is permissible under the circumstances described above, we want to emphasize that it is not required. It is not the best testimony to the covenant-keeping love of Christ and His church. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7).
10. When divorce seems inevitable, an offended spouse can imitate God’s love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20). In cases of spousal abuse, there is zero tolerance. Protection of the abused person will be of utmost priority.

Elder Involvement

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it is threatened with seeming dissolution. Therefore, when a member of C3 is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our elders and cooperate with them as they determine whether biblical grounds exist for the separation, and as they endeavor to promote repentance

and reconciliation, and pursue redemptive discipline, if appropriate. Separated spouses who are moving toward divorce, but are still legally married, must refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is warranted according to the guidelines mentioned above, and that every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace, and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God also graciously extends His love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done what the Scripture requires rebuilding broken relationships.

Bibliography on Divorce and Remarriage

Westminster Confession, Chapter 24, Of Marriage and Divorce

This historic document of reformed churches accords well with the C3 policy.

John MacArthur, Divorce and Remarriage.

This white paper was distributed at Dr. MacArthur's annual Shepherd's Conference. He is especially helpful in clarifying the confusion regarding the Deut. 24 passage.

Loraine Boettner, Divorce

Though dated, this excellent small treatise is easy to read and understand.

Charles R. Swindoll, Divorce and Remarriage: the Biblical Perspective

A brief, clear presentation in booklet form.

Books

Jay Adams, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible.

Adams handles these complicated subjects in his typical straight-forward manner.

John Murray, Divorce

This older work is still considered a standard in reformed circles.

H. Wayne House, ed., Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views

A point-counterpoint debate between four evangelicals on the issue.

Jim Newheiser, Marriage Divorce and Remarriage

Answers 40 critical & complex questions on the subject.