

Guidelines for Dealing with Divorce and Remarriage at Christ Chapel Bible Church

Divorce: Divorce is always the last option for believers. Because God hates divorce and can do miracles when people persevere, we should encourage believers to persevere in the resolution of marital difficulties and strife regardless of the cause or issues. No one should initiate a divorce unless their partner is guilty of repeatedly breaking the marriage covenant and is unrepentant and unwilling to submit to local church authority.

Nonetheless, there are certain circumstances under which Scripture outlines permissible grounds for divorce as noted below:

- When a spouse is involved in ongoing, unrepentant marital unfaithfulness (Matt. 19:9)
- When a spouse deserts or divorces their partner thus evidencing a disregard for God's desire for permanency in marriage and will not be reconciled (Gen. 2:23-24; 1 Cor. 7:15)

Reconciliation: The process of reconciliation includes genuine repentance and forgiveness. Reconciliation is the highest practical witness of divine grace and forgiveness. No sin or offense should be considered unforgivable and irreconcilable. Couples should be encouraged and in most cases required to seek reconciliation through repentance and forgiveness before entertaining the thoughts of divorce.

Genuine repentance would be characterized by:

- A willingness to submit to authority outside of oneself to receive direction and necessary steps toward real change.
- A true sorrow over sins committed and a desire to turn away from those sins
- A yielding to God and His Word regarding the recognition, assessment and confession of any sins committed.
- A desire to be reconciled with the person against whom the sins were committed and those who may have been affected (children in most cases).

It is important to note that often the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Repentance is often the result of a process of moving toward God and His Word. Assessing whether a person is moving toward true godly repentance or is simply dealing with worldly sorrow requires discernment and much prayer. A complete cessation of a particular sin or the lack thereof, while the goal, cannot be the benchmark of true repentance. As Jesus indicated, a brother may sin against a brother seven times in the same day and truly repent. The repeated repentance may be an indicator that no change has truly occurred, but it can also mean that a true battle over the flesh is in place. While forgiveness may be granted once, the move toward reconciliation is a process that may take some time as healing takes place and trust rebuilt. A committee for reconciliation should follow up in order to encourage and accompany the reconciled couple in this journey towards healing and reconciliation.

Remarriage: While remarriage should never be entered into lightly, we feel that Scripture outlines certain grounds for remarriage as set forth below:

- Death breaks the marriage bond, so remarriage is permissible without question for a believing widow or widower (Rom.7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).
- If the previous marriage and divorce occurred prior to a saving belief in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).
- If the previous marriage ended in divorce due to the reasons noted above.
- Once the former spouse remarries, the remaining spouse *may* be free to remarry a believer.

Before any remarriage occurs, the following steps should be taken:

- Serious efforts should be made at reconciliation, including the involvement of the church, if necessary. Both parties must be encouraged to be reconciled to God and to their spouses (1 Cor. 7:11).
- An assessment should be made as to whether sufficient steps have been taken to ensure there has been healing from any destructive behaviors or attitudes and confession and repentance from any wrongs that may have contributed to the divorce.

General: The following guidelines should also be taken into consideration in matters involving divorce and remarriage:

- Generally, those couples who present themselves for remarriage by a CCBC pastor or who wish to be married at CCBC should meet the criteria set forth in these guidelines.
- However, if a CCBC pastor is asked to remarry a couple who do not meet these criteria please understand that he is free to decline and the couple may seek other arrangements.
 1. The pastor and the couple should examine together all of the relevant Scriptures dealing with divorce and remarriage.
 2. If, after prayerful consideration of these things, both the couple and the pastor involved believe that they can go forward without violating their conscience before God, they should seek the counsel of designated CCBC leadership. If, after receiving such counsel, there is still a feeling that an exception is warranted the pastor involved should come to the Elder Board for discussion of the specific basis for the exception.
 3. Every effort should be made to try to discern the probability of success in the new marriage.
 4. Careful consideration should be given to whether or not the couple are walking with Christ and seeking to serve Him.

Pre-Marital Counseling for those who do not meet the criteria and who will not be married by a CCBC pastor:

- If a couple decides to go forward with their plans for marriage anyway, we should still offer to provide premarital counseling. It should be our objective to maintain a loving relationship with them so we can continue to lead them to a deeper walk with Christ.