

Divorce and Remarriage in the Church

It is the responsibility of the Church to provide biblical, redemptive assistance to members who are struggling with a variety of divorce and re-marital issues. Below is our current best thinking concerning biblical grounds for divorce and biblical grounds for remarriage.

I. Permissible Grounds For Divorce

Once all avenues for biblically based reconciliation have been exhausted, when is it permissible for a couple to divorce? Several marital scenarios have been isolated as grounds for divorce. In all scenarios, it is assumed that the believer is actively engaged in pastoral counsel here in the Vineyard.

A. Sexual Immorality:

In Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:1-12, the continual, unrepentant practice of sexual immorality (“porneia” = fornication, homosexuality, child molestation, bestiality, and other deviant sexual behavior) on the part of a spouse can be grounds for divorce.

B. Desertion

Based upon 1 Corinthians 7:15, if an unbelieving spouse no longer desires to live with the spouse (a believer), then divorce is permissible. If the unbeliever wants to remain married, the believer cannot divorce.

We judge that it is not God’s will to have a man or woman “remain in limbo” forever if his/her unbelieving spouse will not push for a divorce, yet is not actively engaging in the marriage for a very extended length of time (timetable not defined, discretion of pastor). Below are listed some possible scenarios concerning desertion.

1. Physical Desertion By An Unbeliever:

This is the clearest rendering of 1 Cor. 7:15. The believing spouse cannot force his/her spouse to remain in the marriage. If the unbeliever physically leaves (not emotional or psychological desertion), the believer is permitted to divorce.

2. Physical Desertion By A Believer:

If, for example, a “Christian” husband physically deserts his wife in a significant fashion, and resists all exhortations to restore the marriage, we would deem him an unbelieving man who has deserted his wife. Divorce could result.

C. Pre-conversion Marriage and Divorce:

A marriage, which was entered into before conversion to Christ, and a subsequent divorce, is not required to be restored once conversion takes place. 2 Cor. 5:17 tells us that in Christ we are a “new creation, old things have passed away, all things have become new.” Divorcing someone is no more a sin than any other sin we commit outside of Christ. Our responsibility to this couple is to encourage them to consider a reconciliatory path, but not to insist on it.

D. Physical Abuse (Sanctity of Life):

We judge that no spouse is called by God to live in danger of physical abuse by the other spouse. Nor is a child called to live under the threat of physical harm. If a spouse resists all exhortations for counsel and repentance, the offended spouse may divorce. Along with actual incidence of physical violence, other potentially dangerous scenarios would include drug dealing and alcoholism.

E. Hardness of Heart (Matthew 19:8):

Hardness of heart, as it touches divorce, addresses a marriage which is characterized by extreme,

persistent brokenness, yet is a marriage which does not conform to one of the permissible grounds of divorce described above.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 we read, “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.” Paul reflects God’s will in that divorce should not take place between two whom He has joined for a lifetime. Then Paul adds, “but if she departs” she is to remain single unless the two be reconciled. Paul is saying there is room in God’s greater redemptive plan for a spouse to leave his/her marriage as a final, unavoidable option. The decision of a couple to cease their continually destructive marriage is to do so because one or both have demonstrated persistent, unrepentant hardness of heart. As we consider God’s redemptive heart, we judge that there are those few marriages which are so broken that it is a lesser of two evils for that couple to divorce. Indications of “hardness” might include the failure of long-term multiple session counseling, severe emotional consequences for children and/or the couple, and a loss of faith that this marriage can be restored. **This instance of divorce is a rare and tragic option.**

II. Remarriage

- A. Now that permissible grounds for divorce have been considered, it is important to address the issue of remarriage in the Church. It is a tragedy every time a divorce occurs (especially in the Lord), but there are only a few marital in which the Vineyard can bless a person’s remarriage. In all cases we would require:
1. Radical self honesty and repentance regarding the causes of the previous divorce
 2. Restored relationship with God and with the Church
 3. Remarital counseling
 4. The fulfillment of all legal obligations
 5. A two-year healing process is suggested before remarriage is considered.
- B. The circumstances in which remarriage is permissible are listed below.
1. Sexual Immorality:
To the offended party, there is the permission for remarriage. To the one who has committed “porneia” there must be proof that fruit unto repentance has taken place for an extended period of time before remarriage could be permitted.
 2. Desertion:
If an unbelieving spouse physically departs, then the believing spouse is free to remarry. In the event that a believing spouse departs, the offended spouse may remarry, but the one who departs may only remarry after demonstrating a consistently changed lifestyle (provided his/her spouse has already remarried).
 3. Pre-conversion Marriage and Divorce:
Because “old things have passed away, all things have become new” in Christ, persons desiring to remarry now that they are in the Lord can be candidates for remarriage.
 4. Physical Abuse (Sanctity of Life):
As with sexual immorality, the offended spouse may remarry. The offender can only remarry after repentance and sustained demonstration of a changed life takes place.

5. Hardness of Heart:

While we have judged that a divorce, which stems from hardness of heart may, in its extreme, constitute the most merciful course of action between two people, this ground for divorce **is not** permissible grounds for remarriage. The only course that can be encouraged by the pastoral staff is that the divorced couple pursues a reconciliatory path. Paul is clear at this point as he states, “let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.” **It is only in the death of the former spouse that he/she may remarry.**

[Adapted from: Duluth Vineyard Church, Duluth, MN]