

Divorce and Remarriage

Southern Acres Christian Church Position Paper

The Bible says that the institution of marriage was created by God (Gen. 2:21-25). Therefore we believe God's Word should be our source of authority for defining marriage and setting the boundaries for the marriage relationship. The Bible says that God intends for marriage to be a monogamous, life-long, loving relationship between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6). Marriage is the highest of all human relationships, provided by God as the best environment for relational intimacy (Gen. 2:18, 25) and child rearing (Gen. 1:27-28). The love between a husband and a wife is to be an illustration of the love and faithfulness between God and his people (Mal. 2:13-16; Eph. 5:22-33).

God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), but because of the influence of sin in the world (Jesus called it "the hardness of your hearts" in Matt. 19:8), the Bible makes some concessions for divorce and remarriage. The Scriptures give two justifiable reasons for divorce: adultery (Matt. 19:9) and abandonment (1 Cor. 7:15). Divorce is allowable in the case of marital unfaithfulness because the marriage covenant has been broken, but this is a concession and not a command. God still hates divorce, and if at all possible, if the unfaithful spouse shows signs of repentance and a willingness to recommit, we encourage the innocent party to seek forgiveness and restoration.

The Southern Acres elders have identified five scenarios under which a person who has been previously married may marry again. Any Southern Acres member desiring to be remarried by one of our ministers or in our building must meet one of these five criteria:

- The former spouse has passed away (1 Cor. 7:39).
- The divorce occurred prior to salvation (2 Cor. 5:17).
- The former spouse has remarried (Deut. 24:1-4).
- Abandonment by the former spouse (1 Cor. 7:15).
- Adultery broke the marriage covenant (Matt. 19:9). When the one desiring to remarry was the guilty party, there must first be signs of repentance and a desire to reconcile with his or her former spouse. If the former spouse is unable or unwilling to reconcile, then after prayer and godly counsel we may allow the person to remarry.

We recognize that these biblical parameters do not allow divorce under other circumstances where divorce might seem warranted. The Bible does make a distinction between physical separation and divorce (1 Cor. 7:5), so we would counsel people in certain difficult situations that physical separation may be warranted until a godly counselor advises otherwise.

We counsel those who recognize they were remarried outside of the biblical boundaries to repent of their pattern of divorcing and remain faithful to the one to whom they are currently married (Deut. 24:1-4). The grace of Christ can be extended to those who have been divorced for unbiblical reasons. Those who have made wrong decisions in the past cannot undo their mistakes, but must be faithful to Christ in the situation in which they currently find themselves.

Questions often arise as to whether a person who has been divorced is eligible for a leadership position at Southern Acres. Because the Scripture says that an elder must be "the husband of but one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2 - literally "a one-woman man"), some contend that a person desiring to be an elder or pastor in the church must not have been divorced. It is our position that a divorce in a person's past does not automatically exclude him from future church leadership. The passage in 1 Timothy 3 also says that an elder must not be given to drunkenness or violence. Most Christians agree that if a man got drunk or was in a fight many years ago as a youngster, that event should not disqualify him from leadership. The nature and circumstances of the offense and the length of time of proven credibility are all taken into account in determining whether a person is qualified for a leadership position. The same should apply to a person's past divorce. If murder didn't disqualify Paul from becoming an apostle and missionary after a decade of proven credibility, a divorce in someone's past shouldn't automatically disqualify that person from serving as a church leader.

We have instituted several policies and practices to help protect the members of our church from the trauma of divorce and to hold high the ideals of biblical marriage and sexual purity. We require a 13-session premarital class before couples can be married at our church or by one of our ministers. We frequently preach about marriage, and we provide marriage enrichment resources to our church attendees. We confront and counsel those whom we know are unfaithful to their spouses. Any person in a leadership position at Southern Acres who is undergoing separation or divorce, whether innocent or not, is asked to step aside from his or her position of authority for a period of time so that full attention can be given to the crisis at hand and nothing will hinder the ministry of the church. Unmarried couples who are cohabiting are asked to repent of their sexual impurity and separate before they may be married in the church or by one of our ministers. Cohabiting couples desiring to become members of the church must separate or get married before membership is granted.

According to Jesus Christ's instructions in the Bible, Christians must live in a manner distinct from that of the world. Christians are commanded to hold to a higher standard of moral virtue and purity, guided by the principles of God's Holy Word. We have instituted these guidelines and practices in an effort to help our members to reflect Christ's love for the church in their marriages.

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