

Marriage Policy Including Guidelines on Divorce & Remarriage

BridgePoint Bible Church is committed to the establishment of Christian marriages and families and the strengthening of healthy Christian homes. Marriage between a man and a woman, like all other good things, was created and given to mankind by God (Genesis 2:18-24). As its creator and designer, God alone is able to instruct us in how to create, care for and develop this one flesh relationship. Foundational to the high value of this good gift is the purpose and permanence attributed to marriage by God in His Word. The purpose of marriage, in an ultimate sense, is to provide an earthly reflection of the love relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33) through the marriage relationship of a man and woman. God's heart for the permanence of marriage is found in Jesus' admonition that "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Mark 10:9). In light of this high value we, at BridgePoint Bible Church, are committed to honoring God's intended design for the covenant of marriage.

To guide us in that commitment we ask that all couples considering marriage at BridgePoint Bible Church, or considering a wedding officiated by a BridgePoint pastor, commit themselves to a pre-marital covenant. That covenant is characterized as a:

- 1) **Covenant of Belief:** Believing that the Bible teaches that Christians are to marry only Christians, both individuals *must be believers* and be able to give evidence to their current and consistent commitment to grow in Christ-likeness. Furthermore each couple must agree to pursue consistent involvement in a local church both before and after their wedding. (Romans 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 6:14-16; Hebrews 10:24-25)
- 2) **Covenant of Purity:** Believing that the sexual relationship has been designed and intended exclusively for the marriage relationship, each couple *is asked to abstain from any sexual relationship* until after their wedding. Furthermore, believing that living arrangements that include co-habitation prior to the wedding is a compromise of Christian witness, co-habiting couples *must arrange alternative living arrangements* until after their wedding. For couples who are willing to make such changes in their physical relationships, we rejoice with them in the Lord's forgiveness and restoration of purity, and are pleased to continue the discussion with them about their potential marriage. (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Timothy 4:12)
- 3) **Covenant of Preparation:** Believing that the marriage relationship should not be entered into lightly, we require each couple to commit themselves to appropriate pre-marriage counseling. This will normally include BridgePoint's Marriage Preparation Class. When the couple is unable to attend the class for acceptable reasons (living out of town, etc) the officiating pastor will conduct the counseling himself or help the couple locate another appropriate course or source of counseling. (Proverbs 15:22)
- 4) **Covenant of Honesty:** Believing the essence of marriage to be the one-flesh relationship, it is important that couples not enter into marriage knowingly and willfully keeping certain aspects of their life and history hidden from one another. Life disclosure is no doubt fearful, but experience has shown that working through such issues is more easily handled prior to marriage than after. The Marriage Preparation Class and officiating pastor will guide couples in this process. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:6; 1 John 1:7)

- 5) **Covenant of Freedom:** Believing God's heart for the marriage relationship to be one of permanence both members of the pre-marriage couple *must be free to marry*. This includes those who have never been married, those who are widowed, and those who are divorced upon biblical grounds. It is our policy to decline to perform a wedding when Biblical principles are violated or in cases where we are in doubt as to the permissibility of remarriage. (please see *Guidelines on Divorce and Remarriage* below)

Guidelines on Divorce and Remarriage

The question of Divorce and Remarriage

All divorced believers are responsible to God for his/her own decisions regarding remarriage. Their decision to remarry should be based on their own good-faith interpretation of the Bible's teaching on divorce and remarriage and their understanding of the circumstances attendant to their own divorce. This decision is, of first concern, between God and themselves.

The circle of responsibility broadens, however, when one or both of the couple are members of BridgePoint, under the care of leaders seeking their best in Christ; and/or the BridgePoint campus is desired as a site for the wedding ceremony and/or the couple desires a BridgePoint pastor to officiate their wedding ceremony. The following guidelines on divorce and remarriage are intended to serve the couple, the church leadership generally and the pastoral staff in particular, in answering the question of a person's freedom to remarry.

A. General Biblical Perspective on Marriage

Marriage is not a human institution, but was initiated by God at creation. This relationship, along with the rest of creation, was deemed good. God's design for this relationship is that of permanence. That is, His perfect plan is that it be a life-long pursuit of intimacy between a man and a woman and that it never be ended by anything other than death. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6) The high value of the marriage covenant is seen in God's use of marriage as an illustration of the covenant relationship that exists between Christ and the Church. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

B. General Biblical Perspective on Divorce

It is not surprising, given the great value the Word of God attributes to marriage, that God would also say He hates divorce. (Malachi 2:15-16) He hates divorce because it distorts the picture of His unending love and faithfulness extended to mankind in Christ and because it brings great pains to families, children, society and the divorced individuals themselves. It was Jesus Himself who said "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate". (Matthew 19:6) Having said that, great care must be taken to make clear that though God hates divorce He does not hate the divorced person. God's heart of compassion, grace and restoration is inclined to the person whose life has been affected by the pain of divorce, who authentically turns to Him, just as it is to those who look to God in the midst of any other painful life event. The Church must see to it that it express the same compassion, understanding and acceptance.

C. General Biblical Perspective on Remarriage

The Scriptures indicate some exceptions to the basic standard of permanency of marriage. These exceptions seem to be a concession in view of the sinfulness of man, rather than a part of the divine standard, and even in such circumstance it should be remembered that God's heart is always first toward reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

One of the exceptions to the permanency of marriage, according to Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, is sexual immorality (fornication). If there is a reasonable basis for concluding that sexual immorality has taken place, then the church should recognize that the believer who divorces and remarries is within the bound of the biblical moral demands. Great care must be exercised in determining what constitutes "sexual immorality" and at what degree of sexual immorality is the spouse free before God to remarry.

Included under the heading of sexual immorality (fornication) are the following:

1. Adultery
2. Homosexuality
3. Sexual perversions such as incest, bestiality, etc
4. Sex after divorce: Even though the divorce originally may not have been due to marital unfaithfulness, if the divorced spouse has a sexual relationship with another person, there has been a severing of the one flesh relationship and the other spouse is free to remarry.
5. Remarriage of a divorced spouse: Since marriage to an illegitimately divorced person is classified as adultery (Luke 16:18), the other spouse would then be counted free to remarry someone else.

The other exception to the permanency of marriage cited in Scripture is abandonment by an unbelieving spouse. According to I Corinthians 7, speaking of the relationship between an unbelieving husband and believing wife (or vice versa), "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases..." (v.15). Many, though not all, would understand "not under bondage" to mean the believing spouse is now free to remarry. In such instances care must be taken to understand the nature of desertion according to the Apostle Paul and whether or not the current day dilemma is, in fact, desertion. Such determinations will require significant conversation between the pre-marriage couple and the counseling pastor or elder.

When either of the exceptions to the permanency of marriage is being considered, it must be remembered that the freedom to remarry is not the only factor to consider in determining whether or not a couple could/should be married. Freedom to remarry constitutes a moral decision that should ultimately be answered with a yes or no. If it is concluded that a formerly married person is, in fact, free to remarry, the wisdom decisions of "is this the right person?" and "is this the right time" should factor into the marriage decision as well.