



TRINITY GRACE CHURCH

Membership Commitments

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Trinity Grace is a church that holds God's institution of marriage in very high esteem. From the beginning God has intended that marriage be life-long¹ and glorify Him by reflecting the relationship between Christ and His church.²

However, divorce is a sad fact in our society and in the church. There are times when our Lord permits a believer to seek a divorce and be released from that marriage.

As Jay Adams has wisely said, "All divorces, in one way or another, are caused by sin; but not all divorces are sinful."³

The Two Exceptions

The Bible addresses this in two specific conditions:

- If a spouse has committed adultery (engaged in sexual contact with another person)⁴
- If an unbelieving spouse has abandoned the marriage⁵

For the church to condone divorce and remarriage, the aggrieved spouse must submit the facts of his or her marital situation to the pastors to seek wisdom and determine before God in Scripture what is permitted. If one of the conditions is evident, the pastors will condone a divorce.

In addition, if a spouse who is a member of the church should seek a divorce from another member due to abandonment, he or she must first wait for the church to follow its practice of church discipline to the end. A conclusion that the sinning spouse is to be treated as an unbeliever⁶ must occur before divorce and remarriage may become an option for the aggrieved spouse.

¹ Matthew 19:4-5; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

² Ephesians 5:22-23

³ Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*, 27.

⁴ Matthew 5:31-32

⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

⁶ Matthew 18:17

It is important to note, however, that God *permits* divorce and remarriage in such cases. Divorce is *not* required. The church will not encourage a spouse to divorce when he or she has faith for the existing marriage to be restored, even if one of the conditions listed above has occurred.

Are There Exceptions to the Exceptions?

Many believers will ask: *What about pornography and other sexual sins that do not involve sexual contact?*

Simply put, in rare cases pornography and other sexual sins that do not involve sexual contact may constitute grounds for divorce.

The word *porneia* translated as “sexual immorality” in Matthew 5:23 and 19:9 could refer to a broad range of sexual sins.⁷ In the context, adultery or other sins involving sexual contact with someone besides one’s spouse clearly break the one-flesh relationship and thus constitute grounds for divorce. Pornography and other sexual sins do not. However, in severe cases where an individual refuses to turn from pornography and fulfill his or her responsibilities to the marriage, it may constitute grounds for divorce.⁸

Still other believers will ask: *What about abuse?*

Broadly defined, “abuse is an improper and harmful treatment of one person by another.”⁹

Abuse may be physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional. However, abuse can be very difficult to prove because both sides tend to have very different stories about what happened. The Bible urges believers to carefully listen to both sides before deciding whether a matter is abuse.¹⁰ See our paper on Abuse [**to be written**].

When is Remarriage Permitted?

Remarriage is permitted in the following circumstances:

- A widow or widower is free to remarry (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).
- An abandoned spouse is free to remarry (1 Cor. 7:15).
- An offended spouse in a case of sexual immorality is free to remarry another believer (Matt. 5:31-32; Matt. 19:3-9).
- An offending spouse, in a case where their previous spouse sought divorce on biblical grounds, is free to remarry.

⁷ Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, 239.

⁸ This position is in agreement with various pastors and teachers, including John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 775.

⁹ Newheiser, *Marriage*, 259.

¹⁰ Proverbs 18:17.

Divorce apart from the specific situations listed in Scripture is a serious matter. For this reason, we do not consider a person divorced apart from the Bible's explicitly listed exceptions as free to remarry.

Conclusion

Divorce is a sad reality of life in a fallen world. For folks who have had a divorce, it can lead to years of regret, even after they are happily remarried and/or have no more biblical steps towards reconciliation to take.

Nevertheless, if a divorced person becomes a member of the church, he or she will be received with great joy and will not be treated any differently than those who have never divorced!