



DIVORCE and REMARRIAGE Position Paper

Introduction:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 - NASB)

The pastoral leadership at High Plains Harvest Church (HPH) is committed to the living, active, inerrant, and inspired Word of God. Thus, we believe that the Bible dictates and governs our lives and cultural practices NOT the other way around.

A central aim of our ministry is to glorify God by accurately imparting and teaching the full counsel of scripture to those at High Plains Harvest Church. This positional paper intends to define, according to our careful study of the scriptures, HPH’s position on divorce and remarriage and how we will counsel and shepherd the body at High Plains Harvest in this area.

Doctrinal Position:

I. A Biblical Definition of Marriage

- a. Biblical marriage is a marital covenant ordained by God between a man and woman that lasts for a lifetime (Matthew 19:3-8; Genesis 2:18-25). God’s design for marriage is to be a lifelong union of the man and the woman that reflects the love between God and His people (Ephesians 5:22-33). Neither a husband’s nor a wife’s wrongful and/or sinful actions can alter God’s intent for the marriage to last until death separates them. Even with wrongful and/or sinful actions by one or both parties, God is in the business of healing broken lives and relationships (Luke 4:16-19). No situation is beyond His care, understanding, power, mercy, forgiveness, grace and restorative love. Therefore, under no circumstances will HPH counsel someone towards divorce. This would undermine God’s greatness and the believer’s great hope, even if the wrong doing falls under the few, narrow allowances for divorce and remarriage provided in the Scriptures.

II. An Overview on Divorce

“This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears,

with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14“Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15“But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 16“For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.” (Malachi 2:13-16 - NASB)

- a. God hates divorce and, therefore, this is our foundational premise that shapes our view on divorce. It is rare when we see the word *hate* attributed to God’s view of someone or something in Scripture so we take this phrase in Malachi seriously.
- b. God hates divorce because we see in this passage the premise of God creating this beautiful institution or covenant between a man and a woman back in the Garden of Eden. Scripture states that God made man and woman into *one* and that they are *His*. (Malachi 2:14-15 with Genesis 2:20-25)
- c. God’s design is that once a man and woman marries, they become *one* flesh not two individual people who are married.
- d. God therefore commands the people after telling them He hates divorce to NOT deal treacherously with the wife of your youth or as another translation states it, to not break faith in the covenant with the wife of your youth. (Malachi 2:14 and 16)
- e. It is our view that God’s best and highest plan for all marriages is to stay married as one flesh because He hates divorce and He intends for marriage to be a lifelong covenant; moreover, His overflowing grace can restore any marriage regardless of the situation.
- f. Yet, we believe there are two allowances for divorce in scripture as an accommodation to man's sin. However, since divorce is only a concession to man's sin (Matthew 19) and is not a part of God's original plan for marriage or even advised, all believers considering divorce should have the same attitude toward divorce as God does and carefully consider divorce as the last option.

III. Biblical Divorce

- a. The only two biblical grounds for divorce are
 - i. Unrepentant Adultery/Fornication - any unrepentant sexual act with any person other than the spouse. (Matthew 5:32 & 19:9)
 - ii. The abandonment of the believing spouse by the nonbelieving partner who initiates and follows through on the divorce against the wishes and actions of the believing spouse.

“But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.” (1 Corinthians 7:12-15 NASB)

- iii. It is important to clarify some issues under this section based on this passage
 - 1. The key phrase in this Corinthian passage is “unbeliever.” This accommodation or freedom for the divorce is if the unbelieving spouse does the abandoning NOT the believing spouse. The believing spouse is not free to abandon or divorce just because the spouse is an unbeliever or wayward believer.
 - 2. If the unbelieving spouse initiates divorce or abandons the marriage, the believing spouse is to still pray for, desire, and pursue reconciliation and restoration NOT divorce.
 - 3. This passage gives a passive allowance or freedom for the believer when the unbeliever abandons the marriage not a proactive directive, advisement, or permission to pursue divorce.
 - 4. Psalm 51:6 states that God desires truth in our inner parts. A believer should not passively assist in the initiation or furtherment of the abandonment or divorce by the unbeliever. Meaning, the believer outwardly states he/she is for the marriage but inwardly or internally sabotages the marriage, verbally states a desire for the other to divorce, etc...
 - 5. The believer is to esteem the other higher than himself and live in such a way that the unbelieving spouse might be won over by his/her love and good deeds. (Philippians 2:3, Matthew 5:16, 1 Peter 3:2)
- iv. It is essential to keep in mind that the Bible merely permits divorce in these limited circumstances but never commands divorce. We want to reiterate that we believe that although divorce may be an option under these two circumstances, God’s highest and best resolution is the reconciliation and restoration of the marriage through repentance and forgiveness.

IV. Unbiblical Divorce

a. Repentant Adultery

“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:10-13 – NASB)

- i. The initial premise that we have stated is that God created marriage as a lifelong covenant and that He hates divorce. Take those two points as well as the James passage above and HPH holds that in cases when the adulterous party stops the adultery, repents over his/her sin to God and all parties involved, and desires reconciliation and restoration of the marriage, that (1) mercy triumphs over judgment, (2) mercy shall be given, and (3) both parties shall work towards reconciling and restoring their marriage. We see throughout the Old Testament that God calls Israel an “adulterous” nation for loving and giving themselves to another. God, though, forgives and restores the nation when they repent because of the covenant that was made. We also see that Jesus commands and teaches us to forgive others in Luke 6:37-38 and Luke 11:4.

Luke 6:37-38 - “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. 38“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (NASB)

Luke 11:3-4 - “Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” (NASB)

- ii. Jesus instructs us that if someone seeks forgiveness and it is not granted, God will not forgive us. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Matthew 6:14-15 – “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15“But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (NASB)

- iii. We believe that while we were yet sinners and enemies of God, Christ died for us. The model scripture and Jesus teaches us is that because of his death at Calvary, our life, if we are a born again

believer in Jesus, is no longer our own. Our life now is to be daily characterized by love, grace, and forgiveness for those who sin against us and seek forgiveness and reconciliation just like Christ forgave us and reconciled us to God even when we were enemies.

- iv. We know this will be painful and very difficult but we see in scripture that God is a God of forgiveness, hope, healing, and redemption! Through counseling, support from the pastoral leadership, family, friends and the church family, a renewed, happy, and holy marriage is possible through Christ who strengthens us.
 - v. We see an amazing biblical example of this in the first three chapters of Hosea where God asks the husband, even though God knew it must have been hard for him, to go love his adulterous wife and as he does that, the adulterous wife is then forgiven and the marriage is restored.
 - vi. We have seen and heard of many marriages that have gone through this similar hard trial and have come through the other side being restored into a godlier and more joy filled marriage. This is God's hope and this is our hope!
- b. Pornography – HPH Church believes pornography is perverted, sinful, and destructive to the spouse and family and we will assist the spouse in overcoming this stronghold. However, the divorce passages of Matthew 5, and 19, 1 Corinthians 7, Romans 7, Luke 16, and Mark 10 do *not* give an allowance for divorce for pornography like it does for the sexual act of adultery.
 - c. Physical Abuse – HPH Church understands how heinous, vile, destructive, and dangerous physical abuse can be and therefore, we take physical abuse in the marriage very seriously. The safety of the spouse and/or kids is of the utmost importance to us. We will take swift and necessary measures to insure the safety of all parties involved as well as the loving yet firm confrontation of the abuser to seek repentance and counseling so the abuse will cease.

That being understood, scripture does not allow divorce for physical abuse and therefore, we do not condone, support, or counsel towards divorce for physical abuse. Again, we will take immediate action to help facilitate repentance, reconciliation and restoration while the abused party or parties are in a safe environment but we do not sanction divorce in such matters.
 - d. Substance Abuse – The pastoral leadership at HPH have seen the devastating effects of substance abuse in marriages and want to be passionately involved to help facilitate the overcoming of the addiction and restoration of the marriage/family.

While we are compassionate and empathetic towards the situation, we also believe that scripture does not sanction or allow divorce in such cases. We will assist the family in ways we are able to as well as direct the family towards the professional help needed but we will not sanction divorce in these cases.

- e. Those are just some of the extreme and culturally popular reasons for divorce. However, those above do not constitute the full or exhaustive list. Please see section *III.* for the *ONLY 2* biblical allowances for divorce.
 - i. In the case that an unbiblical divorce and remarriage has occurred, the parties should repent and seek forgiveness in an appropriate sensitive fashion (consider asking the counsel of the pastor(s) – Hebrews 13:17). In the case that there are those seeking an unbiblical divorce or marriage, church restoration and discipline will be applied out of a heart to love them to genuine repentance and restoration (Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5, Matthew 18).

V. Remarriage

- a. It is lawful for believers to get remarried after a biblical or unbiblical divorce if the divorce occurred while the believer was an unbeliever. Again, if the divorce occurred while the believer was still an unbeliever, then he/she is not held to the standard set forth for believers. (Romans 6:4-7, Ephesians 2:1-3, Galatians 5:16-25, 2 Corinthians 5:17)
- b. According to the Old Testament pattern, remarriage was allowed after the divorce (the exception is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The New Testament allows for remarriage after the death of the spouse or *only* when a divorce was based upon biblical grounds (I Corinthians 7:15).
- c. In cases where the divorce was not for the two reasons stated above in section *III.*, the believer is exhorted to (1) seek reconciliation with the spouse or (2) remain unmarried if reconciliation is not possible due to the unlawful or lawful remarriage of the other party or if the other party has since died *after* the unlawful divorce (I Corinthians 7:10-11).
- d. When any party remarries after a divorce that was on unbiblical grounds, that person has committed adultery because God did not recognize the validity of the divorce (Matthew 5:32; Mark 10:11)
 - i. If the party who unlawfully remarried repents during the subsequent marriage, the repentance is recognized, nonetheless, he/she is to remain remarried in that marriage and not get another unlawful divorce.

- e. In summary, remarriage is permitted for
 - i. Believers who got divorced *before* they were born again believers of Jesus or
 - ii. For the innocent party when the divorce was on biblical grounds or
 - iii. When the spouse died during the marriage.
- f. In cases where a divorce was obtained between believers on unbiblical grounds, the person(s) who remarries commits "adultery" (Matthew 19:9) and the person who marries a person who was divorced on unbiblical grounds also commits adultery (Luke 16:18, Mark 10:12)

VI. Conclusion

- a. The pastoral leadership at High Plains Harvest Church esteems God's marital covenant very highly and desires, like God, for all marriages to last for a lifetime. We also understand that in this life people harden their hearts to God and their spouse, sin and thus marriages get very difficult.
- b. In those cases when divorce is being discussed, is happening, or has already happened, we will seek to apply God's principles as outlined above with gentleness and respect, from a heart that genuinely loves God and those precious, hurting people who are involved.
- c. Believers who pursue divorce on unbiblical grounds are subject to church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God. The one who obtains a divorce on unbiblical grounds and remarries is living in a state of "adultery" since God did not recognize the validity of the original divorce (Matthew 5:32, Mark 10:11-12). That person seeking the unlawful remarriage is also subject to the steps of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 and as illustrated in I Corinthians 5:1-13.
- d. It is our hope and prayer that all marriages at HPH will last until death does them part. It is in that hope that we will not direct or advise any troubled marriage towards divorce but we will labor, assist, and counsel any distressed marriage towards reconciliation and restoration. We desire that the marriage be a fulfilling and God glorifying testimony of God's grace and power to those around them.