

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marriage Represents the Union of a Man and a Woman for Life

God's perfect blueprint for marriage is expressed in both the New and Old Testament. In the very beginning God said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Jesus quotes those same words and then adds, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 10:7-9). These verses speak of permanence, unity, and intimacy which the Apostle compares to the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33).

A Christian marriage is one of God's most powerful illustrations of Christ's love and faithfulness to His own. Marriage should therefore not be entered into lightly, but reverently under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit and with the help of spiritual counsel from those mature in Christian faith. The following specific directives are given to us regarding marriage:

1. If an individual is able to remain single, the Apostle Paul states, "It is good for them to remain even as I am" because "He who is unmarried care for the things that belong to the Lord - how he may please the Lord, while the married person has responsibilities to please his spouse" (1 Corinthians 7:8, 32-33).
2. Sexual intimacy was given by God for enjoyment in the context of a marriage union. All sexual intimacy outside of the marriage relationship is sin (1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Hebrews 13:4).
3. Christians may not be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness, and what communion has light with darkness . . . ?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
4. Marriage is a public declaration by two people, committing themselves to share the joys and trials of life together until death does them part. The marriage ceremony therefore represents both a spiritual and a legal agreement which recognizes a specific act where two people become "one flesh" (Matthew 19:6; Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39-40).

COUPLES PLANNING TO BE UNITED IN MARRIAGE AT ARBORG CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH WILL BE REQUIRED TO ATTEND THE PRE-MARRIAGE COUNSELING SESSIONS WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO ASSIST COUPLES IN THEIR PREPARATION FOR THIS IMPORTANT STEP. THE FINAL COMMITMENT BY A PASTOR TO OFFICIATE AT A WEDDING WILL BE MADE AFTER THE FIRST TWO COUNSELING SESSIONS.

Divorce and Remarriage

We believe and teach that marriage unites two people for life. However, we also realize that under the circumstances of life and the influences of contemporary society, some marriages are broken. We believe that such a disruption is always the result of sin and disobedience. However, when the person, or persons, involved recognize their failure and repent of their sin, they receive forgiveness and are accepted by the Lord as members of His body. Should such a person seek to become a member of the Arborg Christian Fellowship, the church is willing to receive that person as a member and provide nurture and fellowship. Such nurture and fellowship would include encouragement and support in seeking to achieve reconciliation with the estranged partner.

Every effort should be made to seek reconciliation wherever possible. Where such reconciliation is not possible (i.e. the estranged partner has remarried) and the person who is a

member of the church wished to remarry, such a person should seek the counsel of the Elders in the local church. Where there is not the grace to live alone or as a single parent, and where there is agreement in the local church, a remarriage may take place. The church will seek to provide guidance and support of the persons involved.

We understand the Bible to recognize situations where there may be freedom for a divorced person to remarry. We submit the following situations to help clarify our position regarding the matter:

i) MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND THE UNBELIEVER

a. When the marriage and divorce occurred prior to salvation, we recognize the grace of God in providing full forgiveness for every sin. "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Psalms 103:10-12).

b. When one of the partners in a marriage relationship is an unbeliever and willfully and permanently deserts the believing partner the scriptures in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 provide some specific counsel:

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

A key phrase in this passage is verse 15, ". . . the brother of sister is not under bondage in such cases . . ." Again it should be stated that the believer should make every effort to make the marriage as workable as possible (see 1 Peter 3:1-7) and not give cause for the unbelieving partner to leave. If, however, he or she chooses to leave the Christian is not under obligation to "plead, to beg, to bargain, or to force the non-Christian partner to remain." Rather, ". . . let him/her leave."

ii) AN IMMORAL AND UNREPENTANT PARTNER

When one's mate is guilty of sexual immorality and is unwilling to repent and live faithfully with the marriage partner, Jesus indicates that there is the option of divorce and remarriage. It should be mentioned that this provision does not imply that a divorce should be considered after an isolated case of unfaithfulness, but only where there is indication that the unfaithful partner refuses to repent and change their behavior. As in other situations, every effort should first of all be made to bring restoration and healing to the marriage relationship. The help of a qualified counselor can provide objectivity and wisdom in such a situation. (Matthew 5:32, 19:9)

IT IS OBVIOUS THAT MOST SITUATIONS PERTAINING TO DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE ARE SURROUNDED WITH UNIQUE DIFFICULTIES AND CIRCUMSTANCES. THEREFORE EACH SITUATION MUST BE CONSIDERED INDIVIDUALLY. THOSE REQUESTS WHICH INCLUDE UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES WILL BE REFERRED TO THE BOARD OF ELDERS FOR COUNSEL.

Prepared on behalf of the Arborg ACF B.S.S.C.
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