

What does Christ Community affirm about... Divorce and Remarriage?

Overview and Introduction

Christ Community affirms the redemptive potential that comes through the painful realities and consequences of divorce and remarriage. God allows divorce and remarriage, on occasion, in response to the world's sinfulness. We seek to bring Jesus' grace, truth, and hope to those suffering through divorce, as well as those who are living in its wake.

Understanding Marriage

We believe that a right understanding and deep conviction about marriage is a necessary first step in the conversation about divorce. Rightly sought and rightly enjoyed, marriage is a God-designed and good gift. God intends marriage between a man and a woman as a lifelong covenant that models his glorious love for the church and also to function as the baseline social fabric of community in the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

Through grace and in reliance upon Jesus, a committed, lifelong marital relationship that grows in love and trust is possible. Moreover, it points to the faithfulness of Christ for his Bride and witnesses to the power of God.

For a broader explanation of our theology of marriage, please read the pamphlet entitled, "*What does Christ Community affirm about Marriage?*"

Understanding Divorce

Given the prevalence for divorce in American culture today, it is incumbent upon us to be clear on our understanding of divorce and its consequences. We believe the church should be a place of healing and redemption for those affected by divorce, as well as a beacon of hope and proclamation for the viability and goodness of marriage.

Although the Scripture does allow for divorce under *certain* conditions, God does not mandate or take pleasure in it. Divorce occurs because of the sinful nature (Matt 19:8). Therefore, we affirm that divorce always arises from sin, both the broader brokenness of humanity as well as individual sinful patterns in each partner. The idea of a divorce emerging without wrongdoing by either party is not Biblical and sets a harmful precedent. Therefore, Christians should not pursue this avenue.

The New Testament gives only one permissible reason to pursue divorce: adultery. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew 5:31-32 and in Matthew 19:1-12 (Mark 10:1-12 is parallel).¹ Jesus doesn't teach that divorce in the case of adultery *should* be pursued. We believe the most God-glorifying route is repentance, reconciliation and restoration.

Other than adultery, a husband or wife should not seek out divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). However, 1 Corinthians 7:15 says, "if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace." In this case, the deserted spouse may permit the divorce the unbelieving partner has initiated.

Every couple faces different circumstances and must wrestle with them amid much heartache and struggle. The question of divorce is heavy, and the decisions are not easy. Given the myriad potential scenarios, such as with spousal abuse, there is no one-size-fits-all answer. We believe it

¹ The Greek word used there, *porneia*, means "sexual immorality" and carries the connotation of any sexual encounter with another person outside the bonds of marriage, thus causing the person to commit adultery.

best that those considering divorce include the wise counsel of the church leadership and counselors in their decision-making process, following the patterns for reconciliation and restoration in Matthew 18:15-20.

Understanding Remarriage

The question of remarriage wades into a nuanced Biblical discussion and ultimately necessitates applying Spirit-led wisdom on a case-by-case basis. One's potential remarriage depends on the circumstances surrounding the first marriage's end as well as what reconciliation has occurred since. With this said, Scripture lays out broad guidelines that act as boundary markers in the discussion.

One is freed to remarry after the death of a current or former spouse, for death breaks the marriage covenant (Romans 7:3b; 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 7:39; 1 Timothy 5:14).

Those who have been married previously, and whose former spouse still lives, should only consider another marriage with great caution.

- **Firstly**, they should consider that remaining single is a good and holy calling, and frees one in many ways toward the service of God (1 Corinthians 7:8, 7:28, 7:34, 7:40).
- **Secondly**, the weight of Scripture points toward reconciliation or remaining unmarried as the preferred routes (Matthew 5:32b, Romans 7:3a, 1 Corinthians 7:11)
- **Thirdly**, those who have suffered divorce due to a spouse's adultery or desertion – and thus are innocent of instigating the divorce - *may be free to remarry*.
- **Finally**, those who have initiated a wrongful divorce should first seek reconciliation with their former spouse, reestablishing the marriage. If this has been done thoroughly but not received, or the first spouse has already remarried, then the person *may* be free to remarry. Wisdom in specific situations will require more lengthy one-to-one discussion and prayer.

We acknowledge that remarriage after divorce is a complicated issue and there is not a clear consensus among the wider Church. For this reason, our policy allows the CCC elders to follow the wisdom of the Holy Spirit as they deal with specific cases, while guided by the principles outlined in this pamphlet.

Conclusions

Divorce is a painful reality of the broken world. The heart of God for His people is always reconciliation, sanctification, and peace. The One who redeems and reclaims us from sin is able to meet us in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, and draw us to Himself.

CCC aims to care for divorcees well through counsel, community, and the offer of hope. CCC is a place for those who have been divorced to find grace and encouragement in their walk with Jesus, including how He seeks to redeem the hardship caused by divorce.