

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage



What We Believe

The Shift Church, Albany, Oregon

March 17, 2023

Marriage

We believe that marriage is ordained by God and is integral to his design for humankind. Marriage is God's idea. He gave marriage to us as a gift.

We believe that marriage is a visible metaphor for the covenantal nature of our God, and that it represents the eternal reality of the relationship between Christ and his Bride, the Church. We encourage marriage that is biblically faithful, and we are committed to supporting marriages with teaching, counseling and prayer.

We define marriage solely as the lifelong covenant relationship between one man and one woman which is solemnized before God. While civil authorities and other groups may define marriage in a broader way, we believe that biblically-faithful marriage covenant is public, formal, and officially recognized. Prolonged conjugal cohabitation neither establishes nor is equivalent to marriage.

- Marriage is the complete and comprehensive union, covenantal and lifelong, between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; cf. Matthew 19:4-6).
- A believer should not marry an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14-15).
- Marriage between two persons of the same gender is not biblically permitted.
- Some believers are called to remain single and celibate; this is an exceptional situation and must be entered into after much prayer and counsel from respected church leaders.

The leaders at The Shift Church are united in our commitment to upholding a high view of the marriage covenant, and to maintaining a church community in which marriages (and families) are strengthened and are supported in times of trial.



March 17, 2023

Divorce

Divorce is the intentional dissolution of a marriage covenant. As such, it is a violation of God's design for humankind. We believe that even when human marriages fail as an earthly symbol of the union of Christ and his church, the heavenly reality of Christ's unbreakable covenant-keeping love for his people endures. We believe that God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Psalm 103:8-12; Isaiah 55:7).

Not every divorce is sinful, but every divorce is the result of sin. In other words, if sin didn't exist, divorce wouldn't either. The Bible doesn't clearly label divorce as a sin, and certainly not as an especially egregious sin. All sin is sin, period. Every area of failure in life, whether it be theft or lying or immorality or gluttony or whatever, is equally abhorrent to God. Forgiveness is offered to all who confess and repent. The cross of Christ and His shed blood have the power to cleanse us from all sin.

The leaders of The Shift Church have held different positions about whether the Bible offers legitimate grounds for divorce in certain situations. Some elders hold that Scripture permits (though does not mandate) believers to divorce under specific, limited circumstances. We also recognize that each couple's story calls for careful understanding of the specific conditions affecting their marriage.

Adultery

Covenant-breaking sexual immorality refers to a pattern of unresolved, unrepentant adultery or other serious sinful sexual acts which dishonor God and one's spouse (1 Corinthians 6:9, 13). Jesus, when challenged by the Pharisees regarding divorce, said this: "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but in the beginning it was not so. Therefore, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery (Matthew 19:8-9; cf. Mark 10:3-5)."

The application for our time is not limited to men. A wife whose husband is guilty of sexual sin is also permitted (not ordered) to divorce.



March 17, 2023

Abandonment

Covenant-breaking abandonment here refers to deserting, or pattern of unresolved and unrepentant harming or endangering one's spouse. Divorce may be permitted when a spouse breaks the marriage covenant by abandoning the other spouse (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:11, 15; 1 Timothy 5:8).

If an unbeliever is determined to walk away and abandons the believer, there simply isn't anything the Christian can do to force his or her hand. If they are persistent in their decision to end the marriage, a believer doesn't have to continue to fight to preserve what the non-Christian has chosen to destroy. You can let the unbeliever go his/her way and you are not in sin if you do.

The relevant passage here is 1 Corinthians 7:10-16. Paul's instruction centers on marriages where one spouse is a believer (follower of Jesus) and the other is not. Specifically, v. 15 states, "if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved."

What about Abuse?

Domestic abuse, or intimate partner abuse, is the desecration of the image of God (Imago Dei) in the abuser's spouse or intimate partner through a pattern of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or actions, to gratify self.

We do not believe that any spouse should stay in a dangerous or unsafe situation.

When serious, stubborn, hard-hearted, unrepentant abuse is sustained over time, we must consider the health and welfare of the other spouse and any children. Any spouse in an abusive situation should immediately remove themselves and their children from all danger.

Is persistent and unrepentant abuse a violation of the marriage covenant that is so severe and damaging that divorce is permitted? We become more and more aware of situations where a spouse is subjected to abuse—physical, emotional, mental, financial, or spiritual. In these cases, one spouse's neglect or willful refusal to honor one's marriage vows threaten the other spouse's welfare. The persistent behavior is so severe that all trust has been shattered.



March 17, 2023

Is this abandonment? Abuse is certainly an abandonment of the marriage vows. The act of “desertion” can be defined more broadly than the simple act of physical departure from the home/marriage. A person can desert a marriage and still be under the same roof with a spouse.

Are these biblical grounds for divorce? Abuse is sinful and is not tolerable in a marriage. Malachi 2:16 tells us not only that God hates divorce, he also hates a man covering himself or his wife with violence.

Some examples of this abuse include repeated beatings, sexual abuse of children, unrepentant addictions (pornography, severe and chronic drug addiction or alcoholism, gambling additions that bring a family to financial ruin), or ongoing mental, emotional or psychological mistreatment of a spouse or children.

When someone is considering divorce

While the Bible may permit divorce under the limited circumstances described above, it does not require divorce but holds out hope that God may restore broken marriages.

The aggrieved partner in a biblically permissible divorce should guard against bitterness and be willing to forgive the offending spouse (Ephesians 4:31–32). The aggrieved spouse may pursue restoration of the broken marriage if the offending spouse proves to be repentant and if neither party has remarried.

When divorce seems inevitable, an offended spouse can imitate God’s love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Ephesians 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Colossians 3:12-14; Galatians 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matthew 18:12-20).

The spouse who has broken the marriage covenant by committing sexual immorality, abandoning or abusing their spouse or who has divorced without biblical grounds should repent and be reconciled to God and, if possible, to their spouse (1 Corinthians 7:11; 1 John 1:9).



March 17, 2023

Church leaders should be involved when a marriage is threatened with potential dissolution. When a member of The Shift is considering divorce, he or she should bring the situation to the elders and cooperate with them as they determine whether biblical grounds exist for the separation, endeavor to promote repentance and reconciliation, and pursue redemptive discipline where appropriate.

Separated spouses who are moving toward divorce, but are still legally married, should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace, and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God also graciously extends His love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done what the Scripture requires to rebuild broken relationships.

Remarriage

Remarriage occurs when a previously married man or woman who is now single marries another believer. The leaders of The Shift Church have held different positions regarding remarriage in cases of divorce. Some believe that Scripture permits remarriage under limited circumstances. In that case, then, divorce that is biblically permitted truly ends the marriage and the aggrieved spouse is free to remarry in the Lord.

Death of spouse

Since death ends the marriage bond, a believing man or woman whose marriage has ended with the death of their spouse is free to marry another believer (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

Divorce prior to faith in Christ

A Christian whose divorce occurred before the individual came to salvation in Christ may marry a believer without violating biblical prohibitions on divorce.



March 17, 2023

Divorce, Remarriage and Church Leadership Roles

Because of the gravity of divorce, it affects an individual's ability to lead in a biblical manner.

In cases where a divorce is biblically permitted

Persons whose divorce is determined to be biblically permissible are not specifically precluded from serving the church in roles of Elder/Pastor or Deacon.

In cases where a divorce is not biblically permitted

Those who have divorced their spouse in a manner which is not biblically permissible are not permitted to serve the church in roles of Elder/Pastor or Deacon (1 Timothy 3:2, 12).

Persons remarried to any but their original spouse after a divorce which is not biblically permissible are not permitted to hold leadership positions of Elder/Pastor or Deacon at The Shift (1 Timothy 3:2, 12).