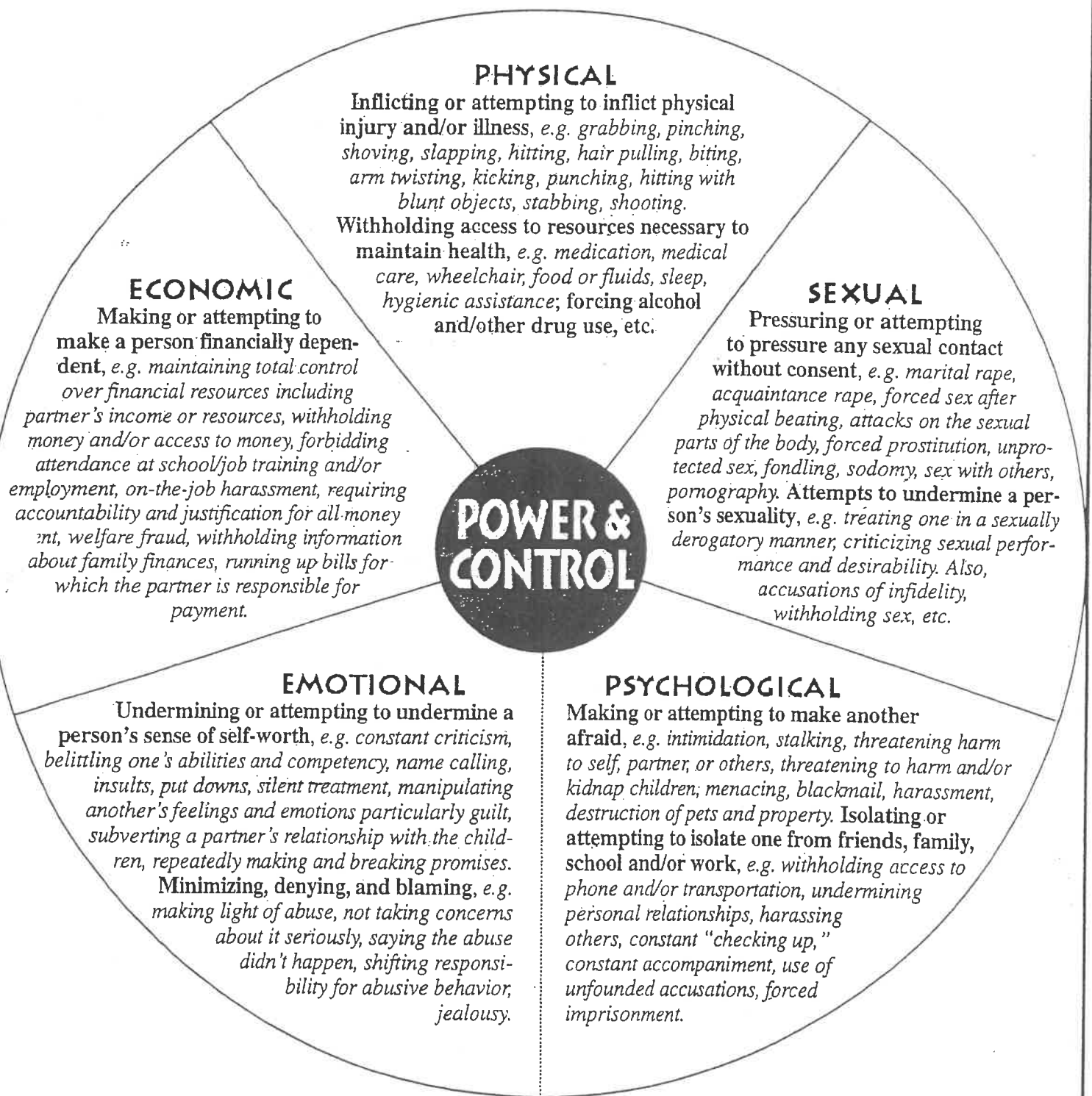


# DOMESTIC ABUSE: A POWER & CONTROL PERSPECTIVE



Adapted from "Power and Control" wheel developed by:  
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# Helping Churches Respond to the Question of Divorce and Remarriage

## Introduction

### I. Construct a Biblical Position of Divorce and Remarriage

#### A. Process concerns

1. Role of antecedent theology - *the Bible doesn't say everything about a subject in every text - a systematic approach is necessary.*
2. Role of context *There's biblical context  
There's personal context, as well*
3. Relationship between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ
4. Relationship of passages to each other  
*what unifies all the texts so the Scripture is unified*

#### B. Develop a list of passages that address the issue of divorce and remarriage

1. Genesis 2:18-25
2. Exodus 21:7-11
3. Deuteronomy 21:10-14
4. Deuteronomy 24:1-4
5. Genesis 21:8-14 and Ezra 9-10 *God commands divorce*
6. Deuteronomy 22:13-21 and 23-24, 28-29 *God prohibits divorce*
7. Malachi 2:11-16 *Israel rebuked*
8. Matthew 5:31-32
9. Matthew 19:3-9 *> sexual immorality exemption*
10. Mark 10:1-12 / Luke 16:18 *no exemption*



11. Romans 7:2-3

12. 1 Corinthians 7 *2nd exemption*

C. Carefully exegete each of the passages for its contribution to the biblical theology

*Are there cases where some things are implied or understood or where not every possible variation is addressed.*

D. Synthesize the results into meaningful statements

E. Consider the works of others

*Wayne Grudem - 1 Cor 7 - argues for abuse as a biblical ground of divorce*

## II. Determine a Process to Use to Evaluate Situations

A. Determine questions to help properly evaluate individual cases

*[see the attached document]*

B. Request the person wanting a divorce to discuss it with the elder before filing

C. The issue of church discipline

1. Sometimes discipline is what confirms the freedom to divorce

2. Sometimes people use the right words, but fail to produce repentance *Words have to be backed up by action or there is not genuine repentance.*

3. Sometimes repentance occurs, divorce occurs, and no discipline occurs

D. Situations where the facts are unclear

## III. Practical Wisdom for Ministry Regarding Divorce Cases



**A. Help your counselee(s) suffer**

We don't know what their future looks like, but their present is really hard

**B. Help your counselee(s) repent**

Rarely in divorce will one spouse be totally innocent

**C. Does your counselee have a firm position in their mind based on the study of Scripture?**

Is your conscience clear before the Lord concerning the decision - how does the choice glorify God

**D. Does your counselee's church leadership have a position on the question being asked?**

**E. Stay with them through the divorce**

This can take a long time + it's a season ripe for sin and physical danger

**F. Remember that your counselee needs a long-term plan for care after the divorce**

Often times every path forward will be painful.

**IV. Practical Wisdom for Ministry Regarding Remarriage Cases**

**A. Ensure the counselee who has had a prior marriage has learned from it**

2nd marriages have a shorter 'honeymoon' phase - less grace is shown - patience is less.

**B. Ensure that both counselees are prepared to live as a second spouse**

There will always be a 'ghost' in the relationship.

**C. Cover basic premarital issues even if they think they know it all**

**D. Discuss issues of children if appropriate**

Remember - the children didn't ask to be a part of this new union. They are grieving the loss of the ideal as well.



## Understanding Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible

One of the great joys at our church and every church is when a man and woman unite in the covenant of holy matrimony. Months of preparation occur where attention is given to the finest detail. The couple spends many weeks in pre-marital counseling. Finally, the day comes when the church auditorium is wonderfully decorated. When the processional ends and everyone stands and looks to the back of the room, few sights are more beautiful to behold than a bride coming to be married to her husband.

### The Importance of the Marriage Covenant

God ordained marriage (Genesis 2:24) and Jesus Christ likened it to His own relationship to the church (Ephesians 5:23). Marriage vows are so sacred that even when people who are not Christians marry, the Bible still refers to their vows as a sacred covenant (Proverbs 2:17).

Scripture affirms the permanence of marriage in many places. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Jesus instructed us that what God has joined together, man must not separate (Matthew 19:6).

For decades, Faith Church has provided biblical counseling services for married men and women who were struggling in some way in their marriage. By God's grace and to His glory, countless marriages in our church and community have been restored.

However, the Bible also speaks about limited grounds for divorce. Faith Church believes in taking the entire Bible seriously (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:3). The purpose of this article is to discuss the biblical grounds for divorce and how they apply to a variety of real-life situations. This document will seek to provide a high-level direction and guidance to help the pastors, deacons, and members of Faith Church understand the topic of divorce. However, a document like this will not be able to cover every situation or possible outcome. One of the reasons that God gave his body elected leaders is so that they arbitrate different cases and determine how to best apply God's Word. We know that God's Word is sufficient but not exhaustive in detailing every possible situation that may arise in the life of a married person. Therefore, this document seeks to lay a broad pattern of thinking and interpretation of Scripture but will not attempt to address every way the conversation of divorce may occur.



## How is the decision made for biblical grounds for divorce?

The Bible describes the role of the church in a variety of ways, including affirming the church's responsibility to function as a court to arbitrate matters between members (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Our church constitution designates the pastors and deacons to be the discipline committee to serve our family when seemingly irreconcilable disputes arise in a variety of matters. When it comes to determining if there are grounds for biblical divorce, the pastors and deacons serve as the body that is responsible to make that decision when the question arises.

This document seeks to provide a general framework for the pastors and deacons of the church. However, the facts in each situation are different and will need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and weighed carefully. Our pastors and deacons take this responsibility very seriously and are committed to spending significant time listening, in prayer, and searching the scriptures for each case. Work will be devoted to investigating the claims of each person and seeking to establish what is true. However, there may be times when it is impossible to determine the full extent of what is true (i.e. he said, she said). In cases where it is hard to determine the full extent of truth, the pastors and deacons may choose to err on the side of protecting the spouse that is in the weaker and more vulnerable position in the marriage<sup>1</sup>.

If a man or woman believes the conditions are present for a biblical divorce, he or she should contact one of Faith Church's pastors to present the evidence. The person presenting their evidence is welcome to bring an advocate of his or her choice. In accordance with Proverbs 18:17, time will be spent listening to the other spouse and any other appropriate parties. The utmost care will be given to listen carefully, compassionately, and completely. Much prayer will be devoted to the process before a decision is reached. Members of Faith Church are asked to not formally file for a divorce until a judgment is made that biblical grounds for doing so are present.

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*1 While this is often the wife, that is not always the case. For example, there may be times when the male spouse may be in the weaker state because of a physical, financial, or mental disability.*



## Does a person have to divorce?

Just because biblical grounds may be present, that does not mean the divorce must occur. Christ makes it clear that divorce happens because of the hardness of our hearts (Matthew 19:7-8). On numerous occasions over the years, offended parties have chosen to forgive, reconcile, and remain in the marriage. If that occurs, the offended spouse cannot subsequently wait to use that same issue as grounds for divorce unless new information comes to light. The offended party should seek to make a decision if they wish to pursue a divorce or not. Cases where sexual sin happened many years in the past, and the offended party was aware and chose not to divorce, will be considered reconciled. Scripture is also clear, a person who has been sinned against must choose to forgive someone who has sinned against them, even in cases where there may be grounds for divorce (Matthew 6:14).

In cases where forgiveness has occurred and the couple has been restored, there may be a desire for a marriage renewal ceremony. The decision for this ceremony will be made on a case-by-case basis.

## The Place of Repentance

One of the defining characteristics and actions of all believers is that they live a life of repentance. The church is not made up of perfect persons, but individuals who are striving to grow to become more like Christ in their personal holiness (Philippians 3:12-14). It is because a person has been determined by the local church to be unrepentant that a person is disciplined from the body of the local church, not because of one sin per se (Matthew 18:15-20). Determining if a person is unrepentant falls to the pastors and deacons based partially on some of the criterion listed here as well as later in this document. Examples of the fruit of repentance include things like: confession of sin and not trying to obscure what happened (Psalms 32:5, James 5:16), bringing sin to the light before being caught (Proverbs 28:13), a desire to make things right both in deed and action (Luke 19:8), a willingness to take radical steps of repentance (Acts 19:19), patience with those who have been sinned against (Matthew 18:21-35), a willingness to face consequences (Galatians 6:7), a welcoming of accountability (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12), and a teachable spirit (Colossians 1:28).





## Understanding the reality of degrees of severity

As will be discussed in greater detail below, the two general categories of grounds for divorce are sexual immorality or desertion on the part of an unbelieving spouse (Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15). All sin is offensive to God, but that does not mean that all sin has the same consequences. Similarly, not all sin is of the same degree. For example, a wife sending a sexually suggestive message to a man who is not her husband is different than her having physical sexual relations with him. A man shouting at his wife in sinful anger is different than him physically abusing her.

When evaluating the possibility of grounds for divorce, some of the issues the pastors and deacons will take into consideration are:

- Has one spouse abandoned the other spouse? Things like physically leaving the home, not paying bills and supporting children will be considered for this question. (1 Corinthians 7:15)
- Has one spouse committed physical adultery with another person (defined by sexual contact with another person—even one time)? (Matthew 5:32, 1 Corinthians 6:16)
- Has a person been unwilling to stop visiting massage parlors or strip clubs, engaging in virtual sexual relationships or internet pornography?
- Has a person been unwilling to stop developing inappropriate relationships through text, calls, sending suggestive or pornographic pictures, or visits with members of the opposite sex? (1 Corinthians 6:18)
- Has a person been unwilling to stop physical abuse or was the physical abuse such that serious injury either did or could have occurred? (Galatians 5:17-21)
- Have the police or other law enforcement officers been involved?
- How wide and publicly known are the marriage issues that the couple may be experiencing? (Romans 2:22-24)
- Has a person been unwilling to stop using sex (either depriving or demanding) as a weapon to manipulate, control, and oppress their spouse? (1 Corinthians 7:3-5)



- Has a person been guilty of physical confinement, financial cruelty (e.g., cancelling credit card, emptying bank accounts, etc.), or withholding common physical provision such as food, clothing, and basic needs? (Ephesians 5:2, 25)
- Has a person been guilty of extended oppression with behavior like: words that seek to control, repeated non-violent acts of oppression, relational sabotage with children, intimidation regarding relationships, or sharing information with others for the purpose or result of tearing down the other spouse? (Ephesians 4:29-32)
- Is there a mitigating health condition or previous sexual/physical abuse that is impacting the behavior of a spouse? (e.g., an injury that changes sexual relationships, a disease that prevents sex, or a mental condition that impacts a spouse's ability to think or reason.) (Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:3-4, 1 Peter 3:7)
- Is there evidence that the spouse wants to be married and is contributing to a peaceable, amiable marriage? (1 Corinthians 7:12-13)?
- Are family circumstances simply part of common human suffering (e.g., loss of a job, hurting economy)?
- Is each person faithfully attending, serving, and participating in the body life of the church? (Matthew 6: 33; Acts 2:42; Romans 12:1, 11; Hebrews 10:25)
- Has each person been willing to submit to biblical counseling (not just attending, but working to change and grow)? (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18)
- Are the children old enough to express an opinion? Do the children have a level of spiritual maturity that allows them to connect Scripture with the behavior in their home and render a wise opinion? (Proverbs 18:13, 17)
- Is the person/couple asking the church leadership for prayer and counsel in order to make a decision or are they simply informing

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*2 The Greek word *συνενδοκέω* (NASB: consents to live with, KJV: pleased to dwell) carries the idea that the person heartily agrees (Lk. 11:48, Acts 8:1, 22:20, Rom. 1:32). This means there is evidence that the person is striving both in word and deed to live peaceably with their spouse. They are working hard to make the marriage work.*



the leadership of a decision already made? (Proverbs 12:15; 1 Thessalonians 3:6; Hebrews 13:17)

## **Biblical Grounds for Divorce**

### **Sexual Immorality**

Both Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 state that if sexual immorality (*porneia*) has occurred, biblical grounds exist for divorce. This clearly includes a spouse having physical sexual relations with another person outside of marriage even once.

*Porneia* is a broad word which encompasses any sexual sin outside of God's will. As discussed above, each situation must be examined on a case-by-case basis. There are other types of sexual sin that the pastors and deacons may judge as meeting this biblical test, especially if the questions enumerated above demonstrate clear patterns of unrepentant sin.

There are also cases where a sinning party may say that he or she has repented, but because of the severity, the spouse who has been sinned against would be told she/he has biblical grounds. In some cases, the sinning party would also be disciplined by Faith Church even if they have asked for forgiveness. This would be done to protect the purity and the reputation of the church since repentance can be a slow process and the ends are not always clear.

There are also certain situations where the person who was sinned against would be determined to have biblical grounds, but their spouse would not necessarily be disciplined if the pastors and deacons believed there was interest on the part of the sinning person to receive on-going counsel even after the divorce.

### **Desertion (not being "pleased to dwell with" – 1 Corinthians 7:12-13)**

1 Corinthians 7 teaches that if a person is married to an individual who is not a follower of Jesus Christ, the Christian spouse should remain in the marriage. However, verse 15 explains that if the unbelieving spouse does not want to remain in the marriage, that act of desertion frees the believing spouse to divorce if he/she chooses to do so.



There are some situations where an unbelieving spouse says he or she is “pleased to dwell with”<sup>3</sup> their married partner, but their actions indicate otherwise. This includes behavior that is physically abusive (and in some extreme cases, being mentally or verbally abusive), an unwillingness to fulfill basic marital responsibilities including providing material support, meeting their spouse’s sexual needs, or not allowing the spouse or children to attend worship services and regular Bible study.

Sometimes the person behaving in this fashion says he or she is a Christian and might even be a member of Faith Church. Since the “desertion clause” only applies to situations where the offending spouse is an unbeliever, the offended spouse should bring his/her evidence to the pastors and deacons. If their investigation reveals that the person is not “pleased to dwell with” their spouse, there is freedom to divorce.

If the offending party is a member, he/she will be disciplined by Faith Church in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17. When that occurs, the church family is making a statement that the offending party is not living as a Christian.

One aspect of desertion is sometimes abuse, a word that is used in many different ways in our culture. The pastors and deacons will listen carefully to any report of abuse in any form. We believe a married person has the right to feel safe and experience an appropriate amount of peace in his/her own home (1 Corinthians 7:15). Care will especially be shown to those who are in the most vulnerable position in the home, namely the wife and the children.

## **Remarriage**

It is Faith Church’s position that when a person has pursued a divorce on biblical grounds, he or she is also free to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:15-16). In cases where a person is a member of Faith Church and has been involved in an unbiblical divorce either before or when they were a member of the church, these decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be determined by the pastors and deacons of the church.

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*3 Examples of this word used else where in Scripture are Acts 8:1 and Romans 1:32 where the picture is of a person giving hearty approval. There is a real desire and outward evidence that what is happening is pleasing to them.*