



A Position Paper on Marriage

FBC Elders
Revised December 21, 2015

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PREFACE

1. Divorce, problems in marriages, and cohabitation outside of marriage are rampant in our society. Sadly, many of these problems arise in the Christian community. Across Christendom today, and among evangelicals committed to the Bible as our guide for faith and practice (including our own fellowship), there is a diversity of views on marriage and divorce. Our challenge has been to identify and promote a foundation upon which Faith Bible Church can offer biblical counsel, teaching, and discipline in this important area as we seek to glorify God.

2. This statement, the result of a study by FBC's pastors and elders, was approved unanimously by the Board of Elders on June 20, 2005, and will be recorded in FBC's Policy Manual. It sets the level of expectation for marital relations that we agree no one in the FBC fellowship may violate and remain in good standing.

As a matter of personal Bible interpretation and conscience, an FBC pastor, elder or other leader may take a more restrictive view. In these instances, no leader will be required to violate his or her conscience in counseling, teaching or performing services, but should note explicitly that it is a more restrictive view than required by FBC.

MARRIAGE

1. God instituted marriage at creation, before the Fall, so that marriage is the usual and expected experience for all peoples of all times (Gen. 2:24)¹.

2. God designed marriage as a lifelong union of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:4-6)².

A marriage dissolves when one spouse dies (Rom. 7:2)³.

¹ **Gen. 2:24** – For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

² **Matt. 19:4-6** – And He answered them and said, “Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh’? Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

³ **Rom. 7:2** – For the married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning her husband.

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There is no marriage in the afterlife (Matt. 22:30)⁴.

The Old Testament records the practice of polygamy but does not command or approve it. Polygamy was and is contrary to God's plan for marriage and does not abrogate or diminish God's design for one man and one woman.

Homosexual unions are specifically forbidden and are described in Scripture as manifestations of the basest forms of sinful conduct since they degrade human dignity and desecrate God's creational design (Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27, 32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10)⁵.

3. The "one flesh" principle is key to understanding marriage as God intended it, key to marital success, and key to understanding issues in marital discord and breakup (Gen. 2:24, Prov. 31:11-12, Matt. 19:4-6, 1 Cor. 6:16, 1 Thes. 4:3-5, Eph. 5:28-29)⁶.

⁴ **Matt. 22:30** – [Jesus speaking] "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven."

⁵ **Lev. 20:13** – "If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them."

Rom. 1:26-27, 32 – For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. ... and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

1 Cor. 6:9-10 – Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

⁶ **Gen. 2:24** – For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Prov. 31:11-12 – For the heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.

Matt. 19:4-6 – And He answered them and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh'? Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

1 Cor. 6:16 – Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, "The two will become one flesh."

1 Thes. 4:3-5 – For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Eph. 5:28-29 – So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.

This principle states that:

- Marriage is a mystical, yet very real, union of one man and one woman for their mutual lifetime.
- This union is created not merely by individual human choice but also by God.
- In this union the partners' primary loyalty shifts from their families to each other.
- This loyalty consists of commitment and devotion to one another, preferring one another, regardless of what problems arise.
- This union encompasses each partner's whole being (the physical, psychological/emotional and spiritual dimensions).

The man, in Gen. 2:24, is told to “cleave” to his wife. This word has two ideas behind it.

- One is to be “glued” to his wife, a picture of how tight the marriage bond is to be.
- The other is to “pursue hard after” his wife.

The natural tendency is to “do what feels good to me” rather than to consider what will benefit the spouse. This self-centeredness is the rut that marriages commonly fall into once the “honeymoon is over.” Instead of each spouse dwelling upon how his or her needs are not being met, they are to remain focused on serving God together and on meeting the needs of their spouse.

Cohabiting⁷ outside of marriage displeases God and is damaging to the lives involved and to society. Sexual relations of any sort outside of marriage are specifically prohibited by God (Ex. 20:14, Lev. 18:22-23, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 1 Thes. 4:3-5)⁸.

⁷ By “cohabiting” we mean people living together and having sexual relations. For unmarried Christians of the opposite sex to live together even without a sexual relationship is contrary to the Scriptural injunction to “make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:14). Further, it may cause fellow believers to stumble, or unbelievers to accuse (Rom. 14:13-23 [especially 21], 1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Rom. 13:14 -- But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Rom. 14:21 – It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles.

1 Pet. 2:11-12 – Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

⁸ While “cohabitation outside of marriage” is not specifically named in Scripture, clearly it is fornication.

Ex. 20:14 – You shall not commit adultery.

Premarital counseling should emphasize this key “one flesh” principle and its implications.

4. Scripture also speaks of marriage as a legal relationship, a binding covenant, a contract (Prov. 2:17, Mal. 2:14, Matt. 19:6, Rom. 7:2)⁹. The terms of this covenant are expressed in traditional marriage vows of mutual loyalty, love, and support.

From Old Testament times, men and women have affirmed this relationship by making solemn vows to one another. Traditionally these vows have provided for the material, emotional, and spiritual welfare of one’s spouse, and have provided the basis for judging whether each spouse has fulfilled his or her promises.

Marriage vows are unconditional, representing a covenant made with each other and with God, who witnesses the agreement. Breaking those vows is disloyalty to the covenant. Reneging on this commitment is sin, which invites God’s punishment and creates undesirable consequences.

5. Scripture identifies four purposes for marriage: companionship, procreation, sexual intimacy, and a picture of God’s relationship with his people (God and Israel, Christ and the Church) (Gen. 2:18, Gen. 1:27-28, 1 Cor. 7:3-5, Jer. 2:2 and others, Eph. 5:31-32)¹⁰.

Lev. 18:22-23 – You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.

1 Cor. 6:9-10 – Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Thes. 4:3-5 – For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

⁹ **Prov. 2:17** – That leaves the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God.

Mal. 2:14 – “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.”

Matt. 19:6 – “Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

Rom. 7:2 – For the married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning her husband.

¹⁰ **Gen. 2:18** – Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”

Gen. 1:27-28 – And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and

6. God declared marriage to be an honorable estate (Prov. 18:22, Heb. 13:4)¹¹.
7. Christian marriages should be the best of marriages because both spouses are pursuing Christ, submitting to the Law of Love, considering each other as more significant, and portraying Christ's sacrificial love for his bride.

Our Lord makes the point that the sanctity of marriage requires not only external acts of faithfulness to one's spouse, but faithfulness also within the heart (Matt. 5:27-28, Eph. 5:21-25, 1 Thes. 4:3-6)¹².

God calls us to a respectful, loving, giving, sacrificial relationship, forbearing one another and preferring one another to ourselves (Eph. 5:21-33, 1 Pet. 3:1-4,7)¹³.

multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

1 Cor. 7:3-5 – Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Jer. 2:2 – “Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, “I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown.”’”

Eph. 5:31-32 – For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

¹¹ **Prov. 18:22** – He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord.

Heb. 13:4 – Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

¹² **Matt. 5:27-28** – “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

Eph. 5:21-25 – And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

1 Thes. 4:3-6 – For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.

¹³ **Eph. 5:26-30, 33** (see above for verses 21-25 and 31-32) – that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also

If sexual immorality, other sin, or separation occurs in a marriage, the believing spouse is commanded to forgive by turning the debt of sin over to the Lord. When reconciliation is possible, the aggrieved¹⁴ spouse should seek reconciliation (Luke 17:3-4; Matt. 5:23-24, 1 Cor. 7:10-11)¹⁵.

A key question always, but especially when difficulties arise, is “What will please God the most?” or “What will bring God the most glory?” All biblical means should be exhausted to keep a marriage together because diligence to maintain the union He has blessed brings God glory (1 Cor. 7:12-14; 1 Pet. 3:1-2; Matt. 18:15-17).¹⁶

does the church, because we are members of His body. ...Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband. **1 Pet. 3:1-4, 7** – In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. ... You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

¹⁴ By “aggrieved” we mean the spouse who is sinned against, commonly called the “victim.” By “aggrieving” we mean the spouse who is sinning persistently, commonly called the “offender.” We recognize that both spouses may contribute to marital difficulties, and that in a few situations it may be difficult to determine who is victim or offender. Either might sue for divorce. For us, the primary issue is “Who is breaking the ‘one-flesh’ principle and the marriage covenant?”

¹⁵ **Luke 17:3-4** – “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

Matt. 5:23-24 – “If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

1 Cor. 7:10-11 – But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away.

¹⁶ **1 Cor. 7:12-14** – 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, let him not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her 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.

1 Pet. 3:1-2 – In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Matt. 18:15-17 – “And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.”

8. A Christian should not enter into marriage with a person who does not know Christ as personal Savior and Lord (2 Cor. 6:14-15, 1 Cor. 7:39)¹⁷. Our love for Christ must always supersede our love for any person (Matt. 6:33)¹⁸.

In the case of an existing marriage of a believer and an unbeliever, the believer should remain married if the unbeliever consents to remain married, so that God may continue to work through their relationship (1 Cor. 7:12-14)¹⁹.

SINGLENESS

1. While most people will marry, some may remain single, or become single and stay that way, for very legitimate reasons (Matt. 19:12)²⁰.
2. We affirm God's gift of grace for service, and the goodness and beauty of a life of singleness in God's service. It is commended in Scripture and elevated by the examples of Jesus, Paul and hundreds of great single saints (Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:7, 32-35)²¹.

DIVORCE

¹⁷ **2 Cor. 6:14-15** – Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

¹⁸ **1 Cor. 7:39** – A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

¹⁹ **Matt. 6:33** – But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

²⁰ **1 Cor. 7:12-14** – 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, let him not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her 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.

²¹ **Matt. 19:12** – “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

²² **1 Cor. 7:7, 32-35** – Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. . . . But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

1. Divorce is a violation of God’s “one flesh” principle, contrary to God’s purposes for marriage, and an act of violence (Mal. 2:16).²²

Prophetic commentary on the sacredness of marriage takes the form of a call for a return to marital faithfulness. In the context of Israel’s own unfaithfulness to God and her profanation of the covenants, the prophets of God denounce the practice of divorce (Mal. 2:13-16; Hos. 2-4; Ezek. 16 and 23; Jer. 3:1; Is. 50:1)²³. Malachi, for instance, who reminded the husband in Judah that his wife is his “companion and ... wife by covenant,” prophesies: “‘For I hate divorce’, . . . says the Lord of hosts. ‘So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.’” (Mal. 2:16)

2. God does not command divorce, condone divorce, or commend divorce.

We believe that there are no biblical “grounds” for divorce, if by this term one means that God approves of someone divorcing his or her spouse.

3. When difficulties arise in a marriage, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation are always preferred. In no case is divorce required.

Sin is always present in the circumstances leading to divorce, and is rarely one-sided. The church can and should deal with this sin through teaching, discipleship, counseling, and church discipline before the marriage is irreconcilably broken.

When two Christians are married, it is preferable for the aggrieved spouse to remain married, to forgive, and to pursue a biblical process of reconciliation (Matt. 18).

²² **Mal. 2:16** “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.”

²³ **Mal. 2:13-16** – “And 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. 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. 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. 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.”

Jer. 3:1 – God says, “If a husband divorces his wife, and she goes from him, and belongs to another man, will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted? But you are a harlot with many lovers; yet you turn to Me,” declares the Lord.

Is. 50:1 – Thus says the Lord, “Where is the certificate of divorce, by which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.”

Separation, in the modern legal sense, is neither a solution to marital problems nor a substitute for reconciliation or divorce. Physical separation to avoid imminent personal danger may be appropriate while solutions are pursued.

4. God recognizes that sin may occur that breaks the “one flesh” principle and/or the marriage covenant, and so permits divorce as a concession to our corrupted sin nature (Deut. 24:1-4, Matt. 19:7-8)²⁴. Jesus noted that a concession was granted because of “hardness of heart” (Matt. 19:8). This implies an unrepentant attitude and expression of persistent sin. We see the following as the biblical reasons that could constitute a concession:

a. Unrepented sexual sin of some sort, e.g., adultery, sodomy, harlotry, incest, bestiality, homosexual conduct (Matt. 19:9, 1 Cor. 6:16-17)²⁵. This “pornea” breaks the “one flesh” relationship.

b. Desertion by an unbeliever -- a specific case of a broken covenant (1 Cor. 7:12-15)²⁶.

c. The deliberate and unrepentant withholding of food, clothing, and/or sexual relations, i.e., the purposeful failure of the husband to care for the bodily needs of his wife and/or defrauding her of her conjugal rights²⁷

²⁴ **Deut. 24:1-4** – “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.”

Matt. 19:7-8 – They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.”

²⁵ **Matt. 19:9** – “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

1 Cor. 6:16-17 -- Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, “The two will become one flesh.” But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

²⁶ **1 Cor. 7:12-15** – 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, let him not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her 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.

²⁷ These examples of a broken marriage covenant are mentioned, or alluded to, in Scripture and are the opposite of the caring, committed relationship which was promised. This manifestation of “hardness of heart” is clearly seen in historical research on documents contemporary with the Old

(Exod. 21:10-11, Ezek. 16:9-13 and 16-19 in metaphor, 1 Cor. 7:3-5 and 32-34)²⁸.

5. A divorce for other reasons constitutes a “wrongful” divorce. Two examples are:
 - a. A “no fault” or “any cause” divorce.
 - b. A divorce with the intent to dispose of a spouse in order to marry another person.
6. The church has a significant role in working with a divorcing or divorced couple.

Testament, such as marriage covenants, court decisions, divorce certificates and religious debates. These documents show that such behaviors were well known and accepted as evidences of a broken marriage covenant which could result in a formal divorce. Both principal factions (the very restrictive and the very liberal) of Jewish rabbis recognized this as a basis for divorce. The passage in Exodus is a foundation for applying a broken-contract test of a marriage, whether of a slave wife or of a free wife. While the Exodus passage, and most historical documents, anticipate the husband as the aggrieving spouse, this is not always the case. A very helpful resource is *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*, by David Instone-Brewer, 2002, Eerdmans.

²⁸ **Exod. 21:10-11** – “If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. And if he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.” **NOTE:** If this applied to a “slave” wife, it would also apply to a “free” wife.

Ezek. 16:9-13 and 16-19 – “Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil. I also clothed you with embroidered cloth, and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands, and a necklace around your neck. I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus were you adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey, and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. . . . And you took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors, and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen. You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them. Then you took your embroidered cloth and covered them, and offered My oil and My incense before them. Also My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil, and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them as a soothing aroma; so it happened,” declares the Lord God.

1 Cor. 7:3-5 – Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Cor. 7:32-34 – But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

After all attempts to restore or heal the marriage have failed, the church will acknowledge the divorce, knowing that breaking the “one flesh” principle or their marriage covenant will have serious consequences for the lives of the couple and those close to them.

In the case of a “wrongful” divorce sought or obtained by one of the fellowship of FBC, the Elders will initiate counseling that could lead to the church discipline process. The goal of counsel and discipline is reconciliation.

In any case, the Elders will indicate displeasure with the divorce, while maintaining lines of communication and love to both spouses. Even divorce should not preclude continued attempts at reconciliation, until one spouse marries again or refuses reconciliation in such a way as to preclude the possibility of restoring the marriage.

7. While divorce always involves sin, which grieves God, divorce itself may not be a sin and certainly is not an unforgivable sin. Nonetheless God expects the Christian to address the consequences of his or her sin.

When a Christian who is divorced recognizes his or her sin and how it impacted the marriage (and perhaps contributed to the divorce), repents of that sin, and properly pursues reconciliation with those who have been impacted by the sin, that person is declared forgiven by God. Whom God has forgiven, FBC will forgive also, and assist the person to seek God’s righteousness in thought, word and deed.

MARRYING AGAIN²⁹

1. Marrying again is never commanded by God, but in some cases it is permitted by God.

Marrying again may not be God’s best. A single life of service may be preferred (1 Cor. 7:7, 39-40)³⁰. Or the divorced spouse may wait for the repentance and return of an aggrieving former spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-11)³¹.

²⁹ We reserve the term “re-marriage” for those who marry a former spouse. It is a specific instance of “marrying again.”

³⁰ **1 Cor. 7:7, 39-40** – Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. ... A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

*Some FBC leaders believe that marrying again is **never** the best option, but that the best option is to remain single, open to reconciliation when this is possible, or in order to serve the Lord without distraction when reconciliation is impossible. They believe that marrying again is a concession to sin or the human condition, as Paul noted that it is better to marry than to “burn” (1 Cor. 7:8-9)³².*

2. Marrying again is permitted for a widow or widower, since death breaks the marriage bond and there is no marriage in the afterlife (Rom. 7:2-3, Matt. 22:30)³³. However, if the widow or widower is a believer, the intended spouse must be a believer (1 Cor. 7:39)³⁴.

3. Marrying a former spouse is permitted if neither person has been married to a different person after their divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). However, a believing former spouse may not remarry an unbelieving former spouse (2 Cor. 6:14-15, 1 Cor. 7:39).

Some FBC leaders would, in theory, allow a mixed marriage in this instance. In their view, a mixed “remarriage” of the same spouses would be permitted, in deference to the “one flesh” principle. They see that this special case is akin to preserving a mixed marriage wherein both spouses agree to remain married. In these cases, the guidance of the elders will be sought for consideration and consent on the role of FBC and its leaders.

4. Marrying again (to someone other than a former spouse) is permitted for:

a. The aggrieved spouse who is not divorced “wrongfully”³⁵. In this instance we acknowledge that the former “one flesh” relationship and marriage covenant are broken.

³¹ **1 Cor. 7:10-11** – But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away.

³² **1 Cor. 7:8-9** – But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.

³³ **Rom. 7:2-3** – For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but of her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man.

Matt. 22:30 – “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”

³⁴ **1 Cor. 7:39** -- A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

³⁵ By “wrongful” we mean a situation or action not permitted, as described in the Divorce section.

b. The aggrieved spouse if the aggrieving divorced spouse has married again, which breaks the former “one flesh” relationship (Matt. 19:9).

c. The aggrieved spouse if the aggrieving divorced spouse has not married again, but the divorce was “wrongful.” In this instance we affirm the application of God’s mercy and His concern for human dignity and justice in the face of “hardness of heart,” in which the aggrieving divorced spouse may be treated as an unbeliever (1 Cor. 5:11, 7:15)³⁶.

Marrying again in the case of “a” or “c” above is a very serious step, in that it cuts off all possibility of a reconciliation (with the former spouse) that God might yet produce. FBC Elders will urge people in this situation to wait on the Lord.

Some FBC leaders take a more narrow view of marrying someone other than a former spouse.

*(1) Some believe that **only** a divorce for “pornea”(unrepented sexual sin) permits such marrying again, and that only the aggrieved spouse may marry again. This view understands the “exception clause” in Matt. 19:9 to refer to marrying again, not to a concession for divorce.*

*(2) Others see **no** allowance for marrying someone other than a former spouse.*

*Some FBC leaders believe that the possibility of a reconciliation brought about by God **must** be kept open, so that the aggrieved, divorced spouse should remain single as long as the former (offending) spouse remains alive and unmarried.*

5. Persons who were divorced “wrongfully,” and who married again without scriptural warrant, should not withdraw from their subsequent marriage. But it would be appropriate for them to confess this as sin personally and to receive forgiveness from God.

6. When a Christian considers marrying again, he or she should do so with the blessing of his or her church leadership. There may be reasons why these leaders believe it is improper or unwise for the person to marry. This is part of their responsibility to teach, lead and shepherd the fellowship.

³⁶ **1 Cor. 5:11, 7:15** – But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one. ... 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.

Given that most marital problems are not one-sided, the one who would marry again should confess all known sin related to the former marriage, and should demonstrate significant progress in overcoming any destructive behaviors and attitudes. He or she should receive counseling to reduce the risk of repeating these problems.

Divorced persons who are permitted to marry again should enter into marriage only with the greatest caution. Each person considering marrying again should repent explicitly of any part he or she may have had in the original failure.

FELLOWSHIP AND SERVICE IN THE CHURCH

1. FBC's policy is to be proactive and preemptive in promoting sound marriages. We will do this through prayer, preaching and teaching, discipleship, counseling, church discipline, and leading by example.
2. While there are aspects of this statement that some FBC pastors and elders do not hold as personal convictions, we all assent to this statement as FBC's guide for teaching, fellowship and discipline on these subjects. It is the official position and policy of FBC beneath the authority of Jesus Christ.

Because no one in leadership can be asked to act against his conscience, each will teach, counsel and perform marriages according to his personal conviction within the parameters of this statement.

3. Persons who are divorced, or divorced and married again, on the bases affirmed in our statement are entitled to the full privileges and obligations of fellowship in the church.

A believer who was divorced, or divorced and married again, "wrongfully" while still a non-believer, will be received into full Christian fellowship. We affirm that upon a believer's confession of sin and repentance, the grace of Christ forgives all sin, and the person in Christ is a new creation.

4. A person in the fellowship of FBC who violates FBC's stated understanding of marriage, divorce and marrying again will be counseled by the church, which may lead to discipline by the church. He or she may be restored to full privileges of Christian fellowship as prescribed in FBC's Constitution.

At FBC there is no **past** divorce or marriage that in itself brings church discipline. None of the divorced and married-again participants in FBC will automatically come under discipline because their divorce or marriage

falls into a category which this statement declares to be “wrongful.” But it would be appropriate for them to confess this as sin personally and to receive forgiveness from God.

5. Our prayer is that all divorced and married-again brothers and sisters will gladly affirm this statement either because they believe their situation was biblically legitimate, or because they now see that it was not, and are genuinely repentant.

When this statement is adopted, a person who is already Family or a Regular Attender of FBC but who cannot affirm this understanding, will not be disciplined or excluded for that reason, because they began fellowship here before this statement was adopted.

6. A believer who has been divorced, or divorced and married again will forego service as FBC pastor, elder, deacon, or trustee.

If a man whose spouse has been divorced is being considered for a leadership position as pastor, elder, deacon, or trustee, the Board of Elders shall ask for pertinent information about the divorce in order to determine if that divorce and their marriage is consistent with the position as described in this paper.

Agreement to this provision is a mark of spiritual maturity which recognizes the variety of perspectives within the fellowship, acknowledges the lack of a church-wide consensus, and seeks to create no stumbling block for others in the fellowship.

7. Requests for use of the church facilities for weddings, or for conduct of weddings by our pastors or other qualified FBC people, will be evaluated by the Elders, who reserve final judgment on appropriateness.