

DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE (A POSITION STATEMENT)

Last Revised: March 7, 2006

This statement exists to clarify for the Coram Deo Fellowship community how we understand the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage and to articulate parameters for responding to cases of divorce and remarriage. Items 1-6 treat divorce and remarriage particularly. Items 7-10 speak to those brothers and sisters who have been divorced and/or remarried. Items 11-13 cover our responses to cases of divorce and/or remarriage.

Regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage:

1. We understand the Bible to teach that marriage is a covenant-relationship between a man and a woman and that God designed and ordained the marriage relationship to be permanent (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:3-6).
2. God hates divorce. To betray the vows of marriage through adultery or sexual misconduct or sever the covenant-relationship of marriage by divorce or separation is sin and grieves God (Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 19:3-8).
3. To “divorce” one’s spouse does not, in God’s eyes, dissolve the one-flesh covenant relationship, and thus to marry another is to commit adultery and to cause the new partner to commit adultery as well (Luke 16:18; Mark 10:1-12).
4. God in His forbearance, does stipulate exceptions to His prohibition against divorce and remarriage:

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

Here, under the Mosaic Law, God permits some cases of divorce and remarriage. The importance of the text is that it shows an exception. Jesus confirms this exception and discloses the reason for it (“because of...hardness of heart”) in Matthew 19:8.

Matthew 19:3-12 (see also Matthew 5:31-32)

After confirming the exception given under Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Jesus articulates another exception (v. 9). We understand this to mean that in the case in which one partner commits sexual immorality (porneia), the other partner is free (though in no way required) to divorce and remarry.

5. No one, individually or corporately, is given authority to sanction or approve divorces or remarriages beyond the exceptions that are explicitly stated in Scripture, and we agree that the exceptions listed above are such (see item #4).
6. Some on the present Elder-Team understand 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 to provide an additional, explicit allowance for divorce and remarriage in the case in which an unbelieving spouse abandons a believer, thus dissolving their marriage relationship. The others acknowledge that divorce is often inevitable, even unavoidable, in such cases but find no provision to remarry.

Those who find an exception in this passage understand the phrase in verse 15, *ou dedoulotai* (ESV: “not enslaved”; NASB: “not under bondage”), to provide explicit permission to the abandoned, believing partner to divorce and remarry.

Those who find no provision for remarriage in this passage understand the phrase in verse 15, *ou dedoulotai* (ESV: “not enslaved”; NASB: “not under bondage”), to mean that the abandoned, believing partner is under no obligation to seek out the departed spouse for reconciliation or for maintaining the relationship. Though a divorce in such cases may be justifiable or even necessary, such does not explicitly permit remarriage.

Regarding divorced brothers and sisters:

7. The brother or sister in Christ who has been divorced and/or remarried in the past must recognize their failure in the past and confess it before God as well as any other related sins, e.g. bitterness (if he or she has not already done so).
8. The brother or sister in Christ who has been divorced and/or remarried in the past is called upon to embrace the full forgiveness and freedom that is in Christ and to be not burdened by any further guilt or regret.
9. The brother or sister in Christ who has been divorced and/or remarried in the past is to remain as he or she is (1 Corinthians 7:20): committed to his or her current spouse in all purity and fidelity as commanded in Scripture (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Ephesians 5:22-33).
10. The church community is called upon to forgive and fully embrace with Christ-like affection the brother or sister who has been divorced and/or remarried and to place no stigma on or hindrance before him or her.

Regarding responses to cases of divorce and/or remarriage:

11. The elders and pastoral staff may decline to marry some couples based on one (or both) partners' divorced status.
12. Some cases of divorce and/or remarriage may be considered matters of church discipline for the purpose of calling the sinning one(s) to repentance and restoration.
13. Only cases that fit criteria on which the Elder-Team is unified will be pursued as matters of church discipline (see item #6 above).