

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Introduction

We believe that God instituted marriage as an earthly picture of Christ's relationship with the church (Ephesians 5:22–32). We also believe that He created marriage to be the foundation of a strong church and stable society. It was His intent, as stated in the Bible, that the marriage covenant should be between a man and a woman for a lifetime.

God never intended for the marriage relationship to function without His involvement. We believe that the most successful marriages are those that are Christ-centered and where each spouse is submitted to God and His principles for biblical marriage. We believe every couple needs the full measure of God's grace in their relationship, as well as training and relational encouragement, to have a successful, lifelong marriage.

Our desire is for the church to be a place where marriage relationships are nurtured and strengthened. Gateway Church will do everything possible to encourage couples to fulfill their covenant commitment in marriage. We will provide Gateway Groups for every couple, whether they have a struggling marriage or a healthy marriage, to learn how to strengthen their marriages in godly ways. We will offer couples loving support and accountability to aid in their success. We will give them pastoral support and biblical counseling as they work through issues on their way to a fulfilling marriage relationship.

Problems to be Addressed

In our society, couples encounter pressure and temptation from an increasing variety of sources, many of which discourage couples from fulfilling their covenant marriage commitment. Many couples lack the training and tools to have successful marriages. As a result, divorce rates in our nation are at a historical high. Hundreds of thousands of couples are ending their marriages each year. In many cases, the results of these divorces are devastating to all involved. The effects of divorce are widespread and are particularly damaging to the most vulnerable among us—our children. Single parent families have become the fastest growing segment of families in the country whose income is below the poverty line.

We recognize and have great sympathy and compassion for those who have experienced the trauma of divorce. It is our desire for Gateway Church to be part of the solution to the issue of divorce in our nation by bringing healing to those involved. Because of the destructive consequences of divorce and our belief that divorce is not God's best (Malachi 2:16), it is our position that Gateway Church will not counsel divorce (Matthew 19:6), but will seek to restore every marriage, believing that God has the ability to heal every relationship, even those that seem beyond repair. (Mark 10:27)

Separation

Separation may at times be appropriate in cases of physical abuse, defiant unwillingness or situations that are so damaging to the marriage that the couples are unable, at that time, to work constructively together towards improving the marriage relationship. Separation should not be entered into quickly or without proper counsel. When separation becomes necessary, it should be for the purpose of reconciling the marriage. The separated parties should continue to work on their marriage with the intended result of being reconciled to their spouse.

Divorce

We believe that once a couple has become one flesh through the covenant of marriage (Mark 10:8), it is God's will that they remain in that marriage for life. As the pastors and elders become aware of member couples who are experiencing marriage problems, we will meet with these couples and work with them to resolve the issues, instead of allowing the marriage to suffer damage or divorce. Members of Gateway Church will be pursued to the extent that we are aware of their situation. Because we desire God's best for each family at Gateway Church, we will not stand aside during times of marital conflict and allow the marriage to disintegrate. We will seek to work with couples to resolve marital conflicts or issues in a way that will produce a satisfying, healthy and lifelong marriage. In working with them, it may be appropriate to advise temporary separation as outlined above for the protection, healing and restoration of one or both partners.

It is the intention of Gateway Church to provide pastoral covering for all member families. When member couples refuse to work to restore or resolve the problems of their marriage and reject pastoral assistance in the process, church membership will be revoked for the resistant party. The member file will be noted. Removal of church membership and its privileges will be deemed as discipline of the church member and will not be restored without a process of reconciliation. When there has been a removal of church membership, the intention of the removal is for the ultimate healing and restoration of the individual whose membership was removed. All member privileges will be removed until there has been a process of restoration completed as outlined below.

Reconciliation

The first step in rebuilding a relationship with a removed church member is reconciliation. Reconciliation is the process of agreeing on the circumstances and events that led to the disciplinary action. Both parties must agree on these circumstances and be able to say the same things in their regard. Reconciliation may involve limited actions of response that demonstrate the person's sincerity in restoring the relationship.

Process of reconciliation

1. **Repent**—acknowledge wrong
2. **Restructure actions**—demonstrate repentance by changed actions and attitudes
3. **Report**—walk in accountability
4. **Restore**—healing from past hurts

Restoration

When people desire to completely restore their relationship to the church, reinstating church membership and its privileges involves further action. These steps will be determined and outlined as a follow-up to the reconciliation process listed above at the time reconciliation is initiated. Each situation will differ, so the steps of restoration will vary according to the situation and will be determined through pastoral counseling and involvement.

Remarriage

A divorce which has taken place before the person's commitment to Christ is covered under the blood of Christ as any other sin previously committed. If the divorced person's spouse has not remarried, Gateway Church will work towards marriage reconciliation as God brings wholeness to the individuals through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit following conversion.

If a couple enters the church in a second marriage, Gateway Church will provide tools to help that marriage become and remain a strong, Christ-centered relationship.

Conclusion

It is God's will, as stated in the Bible, that the marriage covenant should be between a man and a woman for a lifetime. We believe this remains God's perfect will for His children. When a marriage is struggling, we believe that God's perfect will is for healing and restoration for the individuals and the marriage, and we will do everything we can to bring this about. For those who have experienced the pain of divorce, we will love, accept and minister to them as they work to see God's healing in their life.

Resources

- *Marriage on the Rock* (Jimmy Evans)
- *Love Talk* (Dr. Les and Dr. Leslie Parrott)
- *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* (Dr. Les and Dr. Leslie Parrott)