

# FOUNTAINGATE CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY

## DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE POLICY

### I. SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION

Some students of the Bible believe that there are no grounds for divorce or remarriage. Others suggest that while the Bible allows for divorce under certain circumstances, it does not allow remarriage. There are also those who believe that if divorce is justified, so is the possibility of remarriage. There are a few who simply believe that God is primarily concerned with our happiness.

There are many mixed signals and statistics to grapple with. The Old Testament prophet Malachi declared that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Yet the scriptures declare that God divorced Israel because of its acts of adultery (Jeremiah 3:8). On one occasion, Ezra insisted that the men of Israel divorce their foreign wives (Ezra 10:10-17). Later Jesus said that sexual immorality was the only grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:9). The apostle Paul granted allowance of divorce when a Christian was married to an unchristian who demanded a divorce (I Corinthians 7:15).

A careful study of each passage is necessary to discover the fact that God is not contradicting Himself through His Word. At the time of Moses, as throughout the Old Testament era, a man became the master of the woman he married. Jewish law did not allow a woman to initiate a divorce. She could remarry only after receiving a certificate of divorce. Any promise made by a woman could be overruled by either her father or husband (Numbers 30:1-16). The husband could have his wife stoned on the night of their marriage if he discovered that she was not a virgin (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). There is little argument that the Israelite society was patriarchal in practise.

Yet a man did not have unlimited power over his wife. He could not sell her into slavery (Deuteronomy 21:10-14); he could not humiliate his wife by marrying his wife's sister (Leviticus 18:18). The LORD gave these laws as a merciful provision for women in a male-dominated society. God was indicating to the men of Israel that their wives were to be considered as people, not merely as property to trade and barter and misuse. A man had to obtain a certificate of divorce and give it to his unwanted wife. She would then be legally released from marriage union and be free to marry another.

#### A. Deuteronomy 24:1-4

The Law recognized the fact that divorces were taking place in Israel, as were many other practices common in the ancient world. We are not sure when the practise of divorce began but it was prior to the days of Moses.

In their confrontation with Jesus on the question of divorce the Pharisees were obviously in error when they said that Moses "*commanded*" a man to give a certificate of divorce when putting his wife away (divorcing her). Jesus indicated that Moses only "*suffered*" or permitted them to do so, and then, not for "*every cause*" as was commonly practised at that time (Matthew 19:7,8).

This is borne out in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The passage gives certain restrictions when a man divorces his wife "*because he has found in her an unclean (indecent - NIV) matter*" (a Hebrew word connected with uncovered stools in Deuteronomy 23:12-14; with Noah's nakedness in Genesis 9:21-23; and with Edom under the figure of a drunken woman in Lamentations 4:21). This verse indicates there had to be some moral or sexual uncleanness apart from adultery, since adultery would call for her death (Deuteronomy 22:22). He was obligated to hand her a written certificate of divorce and send her away from his house.

When she went out of his house and had another husband (it was assumed she would do this) and the other husband hated her and also wrote her a certificate of divorce and gave it into her hand and sent her out of his house, or if the other husband died who took her to be his wife, her first husband who sent her away would not be able to return and take her (again) to be his wife."

In other words, a man was to think twice before he divorced his wife even for what seemed to be a good reason. He may have wanted her back, but if she had married again, he could not have her the second time.

#### **B. Malachi 2:13-16**

This passage shows that divorce is treachery (deceitful unfaithfulness) against your companion. It is also a violent thing coming from a wrong spirit. Worst of all, it hinders the growth of a "holy seed." Broken homes do not tend to produce the healthiest offspring.

Divorce was not in God's original intention for man. God's purposes in marriage are not helped by breaking the yoke. They can only be carried out as the pair subject themselves to Christ and each other. Such a relationship is beautifully described in Ephesians 5:21-31.

#### **C. Matthew 19:1-10**

The Jewish leaders of the day were divided into two main groups - the followers of Rabbi Shammai and the followers of Rabbi Hillel. The Pharisees were trying to force Jesus into an argument. Jesus called them back to the ideal before making a pronouncement that would not bring about a confrontation.

Jesus said that divorce was wrong "*except for sexual immorality (marital unfaithfulness - NIV).*" The Greek word used is "*porneia*", a term used to describe a wide variety of sexual sins. When it was used with "*moicheia or adultery*", it denoted a sexual sin involving at least one unmarried person or some form of perverted sexual behaviour.

The feminine form of the word "*porne*" dealt with prostitution. the masculine form of the word " *pornos*" dealt either with a man who was promiscuous or one who had engaged in a perverted sexual behaviour. On rare occasions it dealt with a marriage of close relatives.

The Jews that Jesus addressed agreed that legally divorced people had the right to remarry new mates. There was never the allowance of giving a certificate of divorce without giving the right to remarry as well. The only prohibition was that they could not remarry each other after marrying and divorcing another person.

The idea that God permitted divorce for sexual immorality but forbade remarriage arose when the early Church Fathers began to view human sexuality as a necessary evil and exalted celibacy as the most God-honouring lifestyle. They went on to even forbid remarriage after the death of a spouse.

The words of Jesus "*except for sexual immorality (marital unfaithfulness - NIV)* carries with it a restriction as well as a permission. Anyone who obtained a divorce other than the grounds of sexual immorality and remarries would have been considered as an adulterer. The Lord's use of the word "*moicheia*" rather than "*porneia*" is significant. When two people whose divorce was not valid in God's sight come together in a sexual union, they broke their former marriage covenant.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that she had five husbands prior to her present live-in arrangement (John 4:17-18). Her lifestyle indicates that she most likely did not go through the procedures of marriage and divorce. It's unlikely that she had been widowed five times. Yet Jesus recognized each man as her husband.

Also Paul in I Corinthians 7:20 urged the church to do their best to stay in their present state of marriage. This letter must have been read to some who were married again after a divorce that was based upon trivial grounds. If these people were living in perpetual adultery, it is reasonable to believe that Paul would have told them to separate immediately.

This leads to the conclusion that when two people marry after a divorce on grounds less than that specified by Scripture, they sin against the covenant they made to each other and to God. Yet this happens only once. Their sexual union breaks the former marriage bond. Their new marriage covenant comes into effect simply by their sexual involvement.

This should not give people a feeling that God's Word is not important. We all recognize that any deliberate disobedience to the Word of God always carries a serious consequence. Believers who truly have submitted their lives to the Lordship of Christ will not act in a manner that openly disobeys Him.

#### **D. I Corinthians 7:10-16**

Apart from these few verse and Romans 7, Paul never wrote anything else about divorce. What he wrote was not a contradiction to the words of Christ. Jesus was addressing Jews who were living under the Mosaic Law. Paul was addressing believers who were both Jew and Gentile, who were living after Calvary and the empty tomb.

The city of Corinth was well known for its sexual indulgence and immorality. The church consisted of people who had been saved from worship that included temple prostitution and sexual orgies. God inspired Paul to write in a way to advise both the single and the married. Paul had to address mixed marriages between believers and non-believers.

Paul declared that a believer was not sinning by allowing their unbelieving spouse to divorce them. This was by no means encouraging the marriage of believers with non-believers. Paul was simply trying to deal with a situation which had developed as one spouse of the marriage became born again. If the non-believer wished to end the marriage, the believer was not to stop it from happening. Therefore, Paul added "desertion" to our Lord's other condition of "sexual immorality."

Those who divorced on grounds other than sexual immorality were to "*remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.*" (I Corinthians 7:11). To enter a new marriage with a possibility of reconciliation was considered committing adultery (cf. Matthew 19:9). Once one of the parties remarried, the other was released from the requirements as if the mate was dead.

We must also address the right to leave an abusive marriage. There is no verse specifically dealing with this concern. Yet the Bible does offer principles based upon other Scriptures.

God has allowed for times of setting aside certain restrictions. God allowed king David and his men to eat the consecrated bread in the temple that was only allowed to be eaten by the priests (I Samuel 21:1-6).

Jesus Himself made an exception to a very strict rule of the Sabbath. It was to be a day of absolute rest for both man and animal (Exodus 20:8-10). The people were not even allowed to light a fire to cook their food (Exodus 35:1-3). A man was stoned during the time of Moses for breaking this rule (Number 15:32-36).

Jesus made an exception of this very strict rule when He rebuked His adversaries. He noted that even a legalistic Jew would work to free a sheep if it fell into a pit on the Sabbath day (Matthew 12:9-13). Jesus declared that "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" (Mark 2:27).

It seems that this same principle can be carefully applied in the subject of divorce and remarriage. Even though God did not agree with divorce, He allowed it because of the hardness of men's hearts. God's ideal way was for a man to leave his father and mother and be united to his wife in such a way that the two of them became one (Genesis 2:24). The only logical reason why God allowed divorce was to protect the wives from their husband's hardened hearts. These exceptions to the Law of Moses appear to be a merciful provision. God hates divorce but He prefers it over abuse to women and children.

We should never take any action until we consider what effect it will have upon the Name and reputation of the One we serve. Wise counsel can offer much guidance during these difficult decisions (Proverbs 11:14).

## **II. SCRIPTURAL PROCEDURE**

When non-believers decide to divorce they can go directly to the courts. It is not that simple for a believer; there is a better procedure to follow (I Corinthians 6:1-8).

We should be very careful not to allow bitterness to find its root in our lives. A believer should wisely consider any actions before breaking the vow of "for better or for worse, as long as we both shall live."

The Bible encourages us to keep an open line of communication as much as possible (Matthew 18:15-21). A mediator/counsellor should be considered to work through the problems. If that doesn't work the church needs to attempt to bring about a change through its influence. If the offending mate does not want to cooperate, then the church is to disassociate itself from the sinning member. Paul gave an example of this procedure in II Corinthians 5:4-5.

Then the matter can be dealt with through the secular courts. Even then, the believer must keep a proper testimony. This procedure may be difficult to follow if one is a non-believer but an opportunity should still be given to follow Biblical procedures.

### III. SCRIPTURAL IMPLICATIONS

We should strive to bring glory to God in whatever we do. We should also do our best to bring comfort without condemnation to those who are suffering the emotional trauma of any divorce proceedings. Divorce should never be considered as the sin of all sins or a continual sin. Those who repent of sexual immorality and desertion can find the pathway to reconciliation.

#### A. Membership is open to all born-again believers

This would certainly include those who were divorced and remarried before they were saved. Paul indicates that those in various social and legal positions, such as the circumcised and those who were slaves, should be accepted in the condition in which they were when they were saved (1 Corinthians 7:17-24). "*Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God*" (1 Corinthians 7:24).

God accepted the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10 and 11). Knowing the frequency of divorce and remarriage among the Romans of the time, it is very probable that some at the house of Cornelius were so involved.

People who have divorced and remarried on inadequate grounds and remarry have sinned. But their sin is forgivable based upon their repentance.

Paul gives the Christian no option but to continue to live with the unbelieving partner who is willing to live within reasonable limits of the Word.

Again, it is very probable that many of the Corinthian believers were married to unbelievers who had previous spouses still living. If God accepts such believers, who are we to judge? However, in no case shall a person be accepted into membership while living in a common-law state of matrimony.

#### B. Elder and deacon leadership is open to those who are remarried

The offices of elder and deacon are restricted by the requirement that they shall be "*the husband of one wife*" (1 Timothy 3:2,12). The Greek expression is literally the "*a one-woman man*" or "*one wife at a time.*" It therefore is dealing with marital fidelity not marriage/divorce and remarriage.

It does not seem to serve any purpose if the church withholds leadership opportunities from those who have properly worked through the principles of God's Word. If they can qualify in all the other areas listed it clearly demonstrates that they have become an example of a redeemed life.

Some would restrict the remarried from all the ministries of the Church. However, every member of the Body has a function and the ministries are given by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:16).

**C. Pastoral leadership is open to those who are remarried**

The Bible lays down specific requirements for pastoral leadership just like that of any elder. The requirement that they be the "*husband of one wife*" is in keeping with the requirement that "*He must also have a good reputation with outsiders.*" Both for the sake of the witness of the Church and for the sake of freedom from entanglements, those who administer the affairs of the local church must meet these and other qualifications. Therefore, we will be open to this possibility only if all qualifications are met.

**IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**A. Membership**

There are now among Christian people those who became entangled in their marriage relations in their former lives of sin and who do not see how these matters can be adjusted. We recommend that these people be received into the membership and that their marriage complications be left in the hands of the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:17,20,24).

We recommend that in no case shall persons be accepted into membership who are known to be living in a common-law state of matrimony.

**B. Remarriage**

Low standards on marriage and divorce are very hurtful to individuals, to the family, and to the cause of Christ. Therefore, we discourage divorce by all lawful means and teaching. We positively disapprove of a Christian couple getting a divorce for any cause except sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9) and desertion.

Where these exceptional circumstances exist or when a Christian has been divorced by an unbeliever, we recommend that the question of remarriage be resolved by the believer as they walk in the light of God's Word (1 Corinthians 7:15,27,28).

**C. Local Church Leadership**

When Christian leadership obtain a divorce and remarry, our church will work with them to guide, support and counsel. Sometimes these church-appointed leaders will be granted a full restoration; sometimes not, depending upon the given situation. A fine balance of acceptance and forgiveness to the divorcee as well as responsibility to our Lord and others believers will be maintained. May we honour God in all we say and do. Our main goal is to fulfil His will in all our lives.

## V. FINAL GUIDELINES FOR MARRIAGES

In our desire to fulfil the will of God in marriages, we believe that it is imperative that we follow God's Word explicitly. Our church stands for and will continue to embrace the principles of the Word of God, which is the framework for the moral fabric of our conscience and our Christian, sexual ethic. We understand homosexual behaviour to be a violation against God's revealed will and contrary to God's creational purposes for sexual intimacy; and grounded ultimately in rebellion against God; revealed in the Bible and indicated in the following Scriptural references:

**1. Genesis 2:24** - *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”*

**2. Leviticus 18:22** - *“Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.”*

**3. Mark 10:6-9** - *“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”*

**4. Romans 1:18-27** - *“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.”*

**5. Ephesians 5:22-27, 31** - *“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless . . . For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*

**6. Psalm 11:3** - *“When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”*

With this clear foundation from God’s Word, we will clearly make these guidelines in view of a Christian marriage.

We would define marriage as . . .

(1) a publicly recognized covenanting together for life. The public recognition of marriage gives it an important social status. Marriage takes on a public purpose as the cornerstone of the family unity, which in turn is foundational to society. Public recognition implies not only social status, but also social responsibility.

(2) between a woman and a man who live together in a relationship. In marriage a man and a woman are united together and become one flesh. Male and female, together being made in the image of God, while different are yet complementary. It is the only union which has the possibility of procreation, the continuance of the species.

(3) characterized by troth. Troth is a commitment to love and nurture an intimate and mutually supportive relationship characterized by mutual submissiveness and other-centred love.

(4) fidelity. The partners in a marriage relationship commit themselves to maintain the marriage for life. The marriage relationship is between a man and a woman which is exclusive in the emotional and physical intimacy it fosters. It should be characterized by fidelity.

(5) lifelong companionship, mutual interdependence and responsibility for each other, and potential procreation. Marriage is a type of covenant, that is, a publicly recognized pledge between a woman and a man to fulfill a lifelong commitment for the purposes of companionship and potentially, partnership in procreation. It is also the prime relationship within which children are begotten and nurtured. It is the cornerstone of the family.

(6) It is symbolic of God’s relationship to his people and Jesus Christ’s relationship to his church. Marriage is a uniting of dissimilar entities, is symbolic of spiritual unity, and forms an example of co-humanity. The Apostle Paul refers to it as a great mystery (Eph. 5.32) which symbolizes the relationship between Christ and the body of Christ, the Church.

All ordained ministers of Fountaingate Christian Assemblies and those sponsored can . . .

**A. Be Involved in**

1. We will endorse marriages that include mixed races since in God there is no distinction because we are all formed in the image of God (Genesis 1:26,27; Psalm 8:5; Acts 10:28; 15:9; Galatians 3:28).
2. We will not make judgement as to the differences that can take place in age levels between the couple wishing to be married since many Biblical marriages involved those of different ages.

**B. Not Involved in**

1. No couple will be married in or through our church without first completing the Enrich Canada Inc. questionnaire. At the completion of it our pastor will evaluate the needs and then go through what is deemed necessary in Premarital Counselling.
2. No person will be married who is an open worshipper of idols (Exodus 20:3-6; Psalm 97:7; Romans 1:21-23).
3. No couple will be married who are living together and engaging in pre-marital sexual relationships (I Corinthians 6:13,18,19; Ephesians 5:1-16).
4. No couple will be married if adultery is clearly taking place ((I Corinthians 6:9; Hebrews 13:4).
5. No couple will be married who are of the same sex. We will distinguish between sexual orientation. In fact, any person(s) engaging in ANY sexual deviance from God's Word will not be married by our pastor or in our church ( Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26-27; Galatians 5:16-26; Leviticus 18:1-30; I Corinthians 6:13b-20; Ephesians 5:1-16).
6. No Christian will be married to a non-Christian (Amos 3:2; Romans 1:29-32; II Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

**We affirm:**

1. That we value the principles of freedom and democracy by which our country is governed.
2. That we cherish the freedom we have to live according to our faith and to hold beliefs which are sometimes at odds with secular society.
3. The dignity and value of all persons regardless of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age or mental or physical disability. We oppose the vilification and mistreatment of gays and lesbians.
4. That marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life to the exclusion of all others;
5. That sexual intercourse is to be confined to one man and one woman in marriage; and
6. That all the appropriate rights and benefits should be accorded to all other relationships recognized in law.