

Commitment to Preserving Purity and Marriages

*So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together,
let man not separate. Mathew 19:6*

God designed sex and marriage to bring Him glory. Marital intimacy reflects the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7). Therefore, He established that sex and marriage to be a lifelong, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matthew 19:4-6). We are committed to living faithful and pure lives before God and before others in fidelity to our marriage vows or chastity in our singleness.

We agree by God's grace, to walk in holiness as an act of worship to Jesus Christ by practicing complete chastity before marriage and complete fidelity in heterosexual marriage by abstaining from practices such as cohabitation, pornography and fornication (Job 31:1; Proverbs 5; Romans 13:12-14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-7:16; Hebrews 13:4). We believe that God designed intimacy and marriage to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ, and others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since repented and have been forgiven through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We want all of you to know that you are welcome in our church.

We recognize the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce. We are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. We therefore require and provide thorough premarital counseling for couples so they may enter into marriage better prepared for its many challenges. We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in weekly Life Groups, in which people can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Hebrews 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we urge and expect husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Ephesians 5:33).

Our leaders provide counsel and support to couples who face marital difficulties. We discourage couples from using divorce as a way to avoid difficult issues instead of resolving them through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness and discipleship.

God hates divorce and desires that marriage be a lifelong commitment (Malachi 2:16). Therefore, we believe that the dissolution of a marriage is a chargeable offense and subject to church discipline. When a spouse has been sexually involved outside the marriage (Matthew 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-16), or when serious or prolonged life endangerment exists, in such cases church discipline would not be sought. We believe Jesus calls us in this way to radically display His unbreakable covenant commitment with His Church.

While divorce may be permissible in limited situations, it is not required. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Psalm 103:8-12; Isaiah 55:7). When divorce seems inevitable, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Ephesians 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Colossians 3:12-14; Galatians 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matthew 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it ends. Therefore, when someone is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our leaders and cooperate with them as they determine whether grounds exist, promote repentance and reconciliation, and exhaust redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

Separated spouses who have filed for divorce should consider themselves married and they should remain faithful to their marriage vows in fidelity and purity until the day a civil court issues a divorce decree. Because of this commitment they should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married in accordance to Scripture.

Every member who contemplates remarriage is urged to struggle in prayer and study the Scriptures, to consider fairly both the arguments against remarriage and for it. We affirm the goodness and beauty of a life of singleness in God's service both before marriage and after divorce or death (1 Corinthians 7:7, 11, 32-35).

When it is possible, we will help divorced people restore their previous marriage. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when that choice is determined that it is biblically valid and there is evidence of true repentance and real forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been an innocent party in a divorce, as does our church. God graciously extends this same love to those who have broken their marriage covenant without justification. That love moves Him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to joyfully restore those who have done all they can to rebuild broken relationships.