

## Marriage Policy

*(This policy replaces the “Policy on Divorce and Remarriage” & “Wedding Policy”)*

### ***Purpose of this policy***

The Elders of New Covenant Bible Church are stating their unified position as to how we will seek to apply the relevant passages regarding marriage, separation, divorce and remarriage in the context of God’s grace and biblical truth.

### ***View of Biblical Marriage***

Marriage is ordained by God and is designed to be a lifetime covenant between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:18-25). Marriage is unique among all relationships in that it is set apart by God to signify to the world the relationship between His Son and His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:21-33). Marriage is to be a commitment that is publicly declared and is in compliance with government authorities (Romans 13:1). A Christian marriage is a union between a man and a woman who are equally yoked in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 6:14).

New Covenant Bible Church seeks to provide an environment where healthy marriages can flourish. This occurs in the large and small group settings, and may include select seminars to aid the development of good marital skills and habits. Also, pre-marital training is required of any couple seeking to be married by any of our staff or at New Covenant Bible Church. This training may be in the form of trained volunteers providing marriage mentoring or other coaching.

While the primary focus is on building healthy marriages, marriages face various degrees of struggles. As such, New Covenant Bible Church will assist couples in rebuilding and strengthening their marriage through various types of support and encouragement based on the assessed need. These would include trained volunteers, pastoral care and professional counseling referrals.

For basic struggles in a marriage, support is available from non-professional, trained volunteers (e.g., Marriage Mentors). The goal is to listen and encourage couples in their marriages.

Should this basic level of support prove insufficient to help restore and reconcile the marriage, the couple is invited to meet with a staff member. The assigned staff member will assist the couple by identifying key scriptural principles, suggesting practical application, and providing prayer support. The staff member may also refer the couple to a professional counseling service outside of the church if they deem this appropriate.

## ***Position on Marital Issues***

### **Separation**

Biblical separation is for a short period of time agreed upon by both, to spend time in prayer and devotion to God (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). This time should be used as a time of evaluation and reflection with the goal of strengthening the relationship.

In case of abuse, refer to the “Family Violence” position statement and “Abuse Policy” for physical separation.

While legally the State of Iowa has a marital status of “Separated” (e.g., the couple no longer lives together but insurance, bank accounts and other benefits are still held jointly), New Covenant Bible Church recognizes this couple as still being married.

### **Divorce**

There is much diversity within evangelical churches on the interpretation of Scripture regarding divorce and remarriage. The leadership of New Covenant Bible Church acknowledges this diversity, but realizes that our body must have a position on divorce and remarriage for church discipline and to set qualifications for leadership positions (e.g. church board positions and staff members). While we do not require that every individual agree entirely with every position stated in this policy, we will affirm the policy as the standard by which we will administer these functions.

- **God's standard is that marriage is permanent** (Matthew 19:6)

Divorce is damaging to individuals, to families, to society, and to the cause of Christ. Therefore, divorce is discouraged. Every effort should be made to strengthen and restore marriages. Jesus made it clear that in the beginning, God made Adam and Eve to be “one flesh” in a lifelong union (Matthew 19:5-6).

- **Sin corrupted God's ideal** (Genesis 3:1-19)

Because Adam and Eve sinned, God's standard for marriage (like everything else in this world) fell under the curse of sin. Divorce became the worldly consequence of sin for the marriage covenant.

- **Divorce is never commanded in Scripture; however, due to sin it is permitted under certain circumstances**

God originally decreed the death penalty for adultery in marriage, which was later tempered to allow divorce rather than death (Leviticus 20:10, the book of Hosea, Ephesians 5:22-23). The acknowledgement that divorce existed is seen in Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Jeremiah 3:1,8; Malachi 2:14-16; John 8:7, and others.

Because of the hardness of people's hearts (Matthew 19:8), in certain instances, divorce is permitted on biblical grounds (Exodus 21:10-11; Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16). In these instances, the victim of the broken marriage vows is free to end the marriage, although this is never mandatory.

Even when Scripture permits divorce, it is very clear that repentance, followed by forgiveness and restoration, is preferable over divorce (the Book of Hosea; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Divorce should not imply a decisive and permanent end to the relationship while the spouses are alive and not remarried. Even after long periods of separation and alienation reconciliation can happen, as when the people of God returned to the Lord after periods of waywardness.

Divorce is permitted in the following situations:

- **Adultery** (Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 19:3-12)

The "innocent" spouse is allowed to divorce the sexually unfaithful spouse. Jesus, in His answer to the Pharisees' question (Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:9), permitted divorce because of the "sexual immorality" clause as found in Deuteronomy 24:1.

- **Abandonment** (1 Corinthians 7:10-16)

Divorce is permitted when a marriage partner, who is not a believer, abandons the marriage. In essence or practicality, the unbelieving spouse is divorcing the believing spouse, regardless of who files the legal papers to officially terminate the marriage.

An unrepentant Christian who abandons his or her marriage is in violation of Scripture (1 Timothy 5:8), and ultimately is considered as an unbeliever (Matthew 18:15-17).

## Remarriage

Remarriage is permitted in the following circumstances:

- **When divorce was due to the previously stated biblical permissions**
- **When the original partners reconcile and seek to remarry**

As long as neither has remarried since the divorce and both are clearly seeking restoration, then the couple may remarry. If a remarriage has occurred for either partner, the original couple cannot remarry, according to Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

- **A divorce occurred prior to conversion**

When a person becomes a Christian, all sin is forgiven, and all condemnation is removed (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1). Therefore, our view is that a pre-conversion divorce does not necessarily preclude remarriage after conversion.

- **When a spouse or former spouse dies** (1 Corinthians 7:8-9)

- **When a former spouse remarries**

The Bible teaches that remarriage severs the original marriage bond, even if the divorce was non-biblical (i.e. not for the reasons enumerated above) (Luke 16:18). Therefore, the spouse who has remarried has committed a one-time act of adultery; thus the remaining spouse is no longer bound by the first marriage.

## ***Implications & Other Guidelines***

### **Church Discipline**

Couples or individuals who do not follow the guidelines prescribed in this policy shall be considered to be erring in doctrine and conduct. Appropriate steps will be taken in keeping with Article VIII, Section B of the Constitution.

### **Membership**

Membership in New Covenant Bible Church will not be denied to anyone who has gone through a divorce, or divorce and remarriage. The issue of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior is the primary concern for membership.

### **Leadership**

A divorce in a person's background will not automatically disqualify him/her from serving as a leader at New Covenant Bible Church. However, a divorced person will be carefully examined regarding the circumstances of the divorce, the quality of the current marriage relationship (if remarried) and the ability to meet the other qualifications required.

### **Ceremony**

Because the purpose of marriage is to demonstrate the character and glory of God, the wedding ceremony at New Covenant Bible Church will be Christ-centered, God honoring, spiritually edifying and will be between a man and a woman who both have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.