



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

**A Position Paper Regarding
Marriage/Divorce/Remarriage**

“What God Joins Together”

The discussions surrounding the "definition of marriage" during the Obergefell v. Hodges case highlighted the ongoing struggle between different perspectives within the United States. While the concept of a "traditional" view of marriage was brought up, it faced scrutiny and was ultimately set aside in favor of broader considerations. The Supreme Court's decision ignited passionate debates among various religious and cultural groups, especially within evangelical communities, where the question of marriage was seen as inseparable from a "biblical" perspective.

For many evangelicals, the Bible is the cornerstone of their faith and the source of moral guidance. Consequently, they viewed marriage as deeply intertwined with their religious convictions. The emphasis was placed on interpreting and upholding biblical teachings, particularly those that addressed the institution of marriage. This perspective highlighted the belief that marriage was divinely ordained, reflecting a union between a man and a woman, as described in scriptural passages.

The church navigated a complex landscape grappling with evolving societal norms and legal developments. The tension between preserving cherished traditions and embracing a more inclusive understanding of marriage was evident. While some advocated for a narrower definition rooted in tradition, others sought to balance tradition with a compassionate and inclusive approach, drawing from broader scriptural themes of love, justice, and acceptance.

The discourse surrounding the "definition of marriage" unveiled the intricate interplay between religious beliefs, cultural shifts, and legal frameworks. It emphasized the Supreme Court's profound impact on the nation's social fabric, prompting individuals and communities to engage in thoughtful introspection and dialogue as they grappled with the implications for their deeply held values and convictions.

Amid the broader debates surrounding the "definition of marriage," the related topics of divorce and remarriage also came to the forefront of discussions during that period. While the focus was primarily on legal recognition and societal acceptance of same-sex marriage, the implications for divorce and remarriage within religious contexts were not overlooked.

For many religious traditions, the question of divorce and remarriage carries significant weight, influenced by scriptural interpretations and theological perspectives. Divorce is often regarded as a sensitive and complex issue, as it involves the dissolution of a marital bond that was meant to be lifelong. Different denominations and communities hold varying beliefs about the circumstances under which divorce is permissible or condemned.

In the context of remarriage, particularly after a divorce, church doctrines and traditions have offered differing stances. Some religious groups consider remarriage after divorce to be morally acceptable, particularly in cases where the dissolution of the previous marriage was due to valid grounds outlined in their respective teachings. Others maintain a stricter view, viewing remarriage after divorce as adulterous or contrary to their understanding of the sacred bond of marriage.

The debates surrounding the "definition of marriage" have inevitably raised questions and discussions about the implications for divorce and remarriage within religious contexts. These discussions continue to shape church communities' beliefs, practices, and policies as they interpret and apply their teachings in a rapidly changing social and legal landscape.

The experience of divorce is excruciatingly painful, often more emotionally wrenching than the death of a spouse. It can take years to come to fruition, settle, and adjust, causing immeasurable upheaval. The feelings of failure, guilt, and fear can torture the soul, and loneliness can be overwhelming. Tears may be shed night after night, and work performance can suffer. People may draw near or withdraw with uncertain feelings, and the sense of a devastated future can be all-consuming. The personal misery is compounded by courtroom controversy, which can be devastating.

Moreover, children often suffer acutely in the aftermath of divorce. Parents hope that the scars will not cripple their children or ruin their future relationships. Custody and financial support battles can deepen wounds that may take years to heal, and awkward and artificial visitation arrangements can prolong the tragedy.

Despite these difficulties, compassionate individuals weep with those who weep and try not to increase their pain. However, some mistakenly believe that loving care is incompatible with confrontation. They believe that Jesus's tenderness and the demands He places on His followers cannot both be expressions of love. This is not accurate.

Jesus was the most caring person to live, but His teaching on divorce and remarriage was firm and could be viewed as uncaring. He said, "What God has joined together let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9). In fact, loving confrontation with the demands of Christ is a form of caring because a sinful decision can be just as harmful to a person as emotional pain.

The church's primary challenge in the face of divorce and remarriage is to love biblically. John wrote, "By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments" (1 John 5:2). This means that true love for people is demonstrated not only by compassion but also by conformity to God's commandments in behavior. The challenge is to combine compassionate tears with tough love and obedience, which is the only way to honor Christ and maintain the spiritual health and power of the church.

As Christians, we are called to engage with the world and address societal challenges and issues. One such issue is the epidemic of divorce in America. In this discussion, we will explore the impact of divorce, highlight some well-known statistics, and offer a Christian perspective.

The Epidemic of Divorce In The World:

Divorce has become a widespread phenomenon in American society, with significant implications for individuals, families, and communities. The breakdown of marriages affects not only the couple involved but also their children, extended family members, and friends. It has far-reaching consequences for emotional well-being, financial stability, and the overall fabric of society. Consider the following well-known statistics that shed light on the prevalence and impact of divorce in America¹:

Divorce Rate:

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the divorce rate in the United States hovers around 40 to 50 percent for first marriages. This figure highlights the significant number of marriages that end in divorce, reflecting the challenges couples face in sustaining their relationships.²

Children of Divorce:

¹ As of the time of writing

² <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>

Approximately 50 percent of children in the United States will witness the divorce of their parents. These children often experience emotional distress, instability, and a higher likelihood of struggling academically or socially compared to children from intact families.³

Economic Consequences:

Divorce can have substantial financial implications for individuals and families. Studies indicate that divorced individuals may experience a decline in their standard of living and face challenges related to housing, child support, and asset division.⁴

Remarriage and Second Divorces:

It is worth noting that subsequent marriages, often called second or subsequent marriages, have a higher divorce rate than first marriages. This indicates that the issues contributing to divorce persist even after individuals remarry.⁵

Divorce within the church has been a significant issue impacting the Christian community. Understanding the statistics and implications of divorce can help us recognize the challenges individuals and families face.

The Epidemic of Divorce in the Church:

Studies and surveys provide insight into the prevalence of divorce within the church and its specific impact on the Christian community:

Divorce Rates:

Approximately 40% of marriages among self-identified Christians end in divorce, which is similar to the divorce rate in the general population.⁶ Surprisingly, even Protestant pastors are not immune to divorce, with around 33% reporting personal experience of divorce.⁷

Church Attendance:

Divorce can affect church attendance, with 25% of divorced individuals reporting a decreased frequency of attending church after their divorce. Feelings of shame, guilt, or judgment within the church community may contribute to the disengagement of divorced individuals.

Pastoral Response and Counseling:

A significant challenge lies in pastoral counseling, with only a small fraction of church leaders feeling adequately equipped to address divorce effectively. Insufficient access to skilled counseling can contribute to limited guidance and support for couples in crisis, potentially impacting divorce rates within the Christian community.

Stigma and Judgment:

Divorce can carry a stigma within Christian circles, causing individuals to feel judged or excluded by fellow church members. This judgment may hinder the healing process and discourage open discussions about the complexities of marriage.

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4240051/>

⁴ <https://www.marripedia.org/effects.of.divorce.on.financial.stability>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4240051/>

⁶ <https://marriedpeoplechurches.org/author/barna/>

⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-07-01-me-19084-story.html>

Ministry and Leadership Opportunities:

Some churches have policies or traditions that limit divorced individuals from serving in most ministry roles. Such restrictions can restrict the involvement and contributions of divorced individuals within the church community. The statistics surrounding divorce within the church highlight the need for a compassionate and supportive approach to address this issue. It is essential for the church to provide a nurturing environment where individuals and families affected by divorce can find healing and restoration.

What are Christians to do?

From a Christian perspective, divorce is a painful reality that deviates from God's original design for marriage. Scripture portrays marriage as a sacred covenant, reflecting the unbreakable bond between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22–33). Consequently, divorce is not regarded as the ideal outcome but is recognized as a result of humanity's fallenness and brokenness.

While this paper is written to speak to the church's position on divorce and remarriage, it is important for us to be reminded that Christians need to respond to this throbbing trend with compassion, understanding, and support. Rather than simply passing judgment, we should strive to offer God's grace and truth to individuals and families impacted by it. To this end, we see a couple of proactive ministries to alleviate this:

Strengthening Marriages:

Promoting healthy, thriving marriages is vital in preventing divorce. Churches and Christian organizations can offer premarital counseling, a robust body life within the church, and ongoing support to couples, equipping them with the tools necessary to navigate challenges and cultivate strong relationships.

Discipleship and Biblical Teaching:

Churches should emphasize the biblical teachings on marriage, divorce, and reconciliation. Engaging in regular discipleship, teaching about healthy relationships, and modeling Christ-like love and forgiveness can help individuals and couples navigate the complexities of marriage and strive for reconciliation when possible.

Cultivating a Culture of Commitment:

Fostering a culture that values commitment and perseverance in marriages is crucial. Encouraging couples to prioritize their vows, communicate effectively, seek counseling when needed, and invest in their relationships can reduce divorce's prevalence.

Restoration and Healing:

The current state of marriage in America demands our attention as Christians and Christ's church. While recognizing the pain and brokenness divorce brings, we are called to respond with love and a commitment to strengthen marriages and promote reconciliation. By upholding the biblical teachings on marriage, we can work towards addressing the divorce epidemic and offering hope to individuals and families affected by it.

Village Bible Church has chosen to address the issue of divorce and remarriage in a special position paper for several compelling reasons. We will examine nine in particular:

- **Addressing Concerns Within Our Body:** As a church, we recognize that individuals who join one of our campuses have a genuine interest in understanding our stance on divorce and remarriage.

- **Providing Elder and Pastoral Staff Clarity And Unity:** It is essential for the church leadership to clearly articulate a unified position on this matter to guide and support our members.
- **Recognizing the Destructive Nature of Divorce:** Divorce can involve sin that can have a profoundly destructive impact on the individuals involved, as well as the children and the broader network of relationships surrounding the marriage.
- **Cultural Significance:** Divorce receives considerable attention. By addressing it, we engage with a prevalent issue in the public sphere. Culture condones and, even at times, celebrates it, and the civil courts often handle it without regard for the impact on those involved.
- **The Uniqueness of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage:** Marriage is sacred because it combines solemn oaths with a sacred physical union, setting it apart from other earthly relationships.
- **The Picture of Marriage:** Marriage holds a special significance as it represents the relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:21–33). Therefore, the dissolution of this bond carries exceptional weight among human connections.
- **Irreversible Consequences:** Divorce is a particularly challenging act to undo. While words like "I'm sorry" can heal many wounds, divorce, and subsequent remarriage cannot be rectified easily.
- **Deliberate Actions:** Divorce is typically the result of planned and intentional choices made by one or both spouses, differing from habits that may involve struggles and occasional victories.
- **Cultural Epidemic:** The prevalence of divorce in our society has reached epidemic proportions. Even secular leaders are grappling with finding solutions to preserve the stability of the home.

By addressing these, we hope to provide clarity, guidance, and understanding to our congregation and the wider community on the importance of this issue within the context of our faith and values at Village Bible Church. To do so, we must look beyond our current situation and see where the historic church and its leaders stood on this issue in years past.

Where does church history stand on this issue?

Understanding the historical development of these perspectives can shed light on the diverse interpretations and practices that have emerged over time. During the formative years of the early church, a consensus emerged among influential figures regarding the sanctity of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Their collective message emphasized a unified stance. They asserted that Christian matrimony was an unbreakable union meant to endure for a lifetime. Divorce, which carried with it the presumption of the right to remarry, was deemed incompatible with the principles of Christian couples. Remarriage after separation was viewed as a serious transgression, classified as punishable adultery or bigamy, with women often facing harsher consequences than men. These early church teachings sought to uphold the enduring commitment and fidelity expected within Christian marriages, reflecting a deep commitment to preserving the sacred institution.

Early Church Period (1st to 3rd Century):

During the early years of Christianity, the prevailing view on divorce and remarriage aligned closely with Jesus' teachings in the Gospels. The indissolubility of marriage was emphasized, with divorce being seen as contrary to God's ideal. Early Christian writings, such as the Epistles of Paul and the Didache, emphasized the permanence of marriage and discouraged divorce. This is seen in the following quotes from the earliest Christians and councils.

Hermas:

"What then shall the husband do if the wife continues in this disposition [adultery]? Let him divorce her, and let the husband remain single. But if he divorces his wife and marries another, he too commits adultery" (The Shepherd 4:1:6 [A.D. 80]).

Justin Martyr:

"Regarding chastity, [Jesus] has this to say: 'If anyone looks with lust at a woman, he has already before God committed adultery in his heart.' And, 'Whoever marries a woman who has been divorced from another husband commits adultery.' According to our Teacher, just as they are sinners who contract a second marriage, even though it is in accord with human law, so also are they sinners who look with lustful desire at a woman. He repudiates not only one who actually commits adultery, but even one who wishes to do so; for not only our actions are manifest to God, but even our thoughts" (First Apology 15 [A.D. 151]).

Clement of Alexandria:

"That Scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union, is expressly contained in the law: 'You shall not divorce a wife, except for reason of immorality.' It regards adultery as the marriage of a spouse while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive. 'Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery,' it says, for 'if anyone divorces his wife, he debauches her'; that is, he compels her to commit adultery. And not only does he that divorces her become the cause of this, but also he that takes the woman and gives her the opportunity of sinning; for if he did not take her, she would return to her husband" (Miscellanies 2:23:145:3 [A.D. 208]).

Origen:

"Just as a woman is an adulteress, even though she seems to be married to a man, while a former husband yet lives, so also the man who seems to marry her who has been divorced does not marry her, but according to the declaration of our Savior, he commits adultery with her" (Commentaries on Matthew 14:24 [A.D. 248]).

Council of Elvira:

"Likewise, women who have left their husbands for no prior cause and have joined themselves with others may not even at death receive Communion" (Canon 8 [A.D. 300]).

"Likewise, a woman of the faith [i.e., a baptized person] who has left an adulterous husband of the faith and marries another, her marrying in this manner is prohibited. If she has so married, she may not receive Communion—unless he that she has left has since departed from this world" (Canon 9).

"If she whom a catechumen [an unbaptized person studying the faith] has left shall have married a husband, she is able to be admitted to the fountain of baptism. This shall also be observed in the instance where it is the woman who is the catechumen. But if a woman of the faithful is taken in

marriage by a man who left an innocent wife, and if she knew that he had a wife whom he had left without cause, it is determined that Communion is not to be given to her even at death" (Canon 10).

Ambrose of Milan:

"No one is permitted to know a woman other than his wife. The marital right is given to you for this reason: lest you fall into the snare and sin with a strange woman. 'If you are bound to a wife, do not seek a divorce'; for you are not permitted, while your wife lives, to marry another" (Abraham 1:7:59 [A.D. 387]).

"You dismiss your wife, therefore, as if by right and without being charged with wrongdoing, and you suppose it is proper for you to do so because no human law forbids it; but divine law forbids it. Anyone who obeys men ought to stand in awe of God. Hear the law of the Lord, which even they who propose our laws must obey: 'What God has joined together let no man put asunder'" (Commentary on Luke 8:5 [A.D. 389]).

Jerome:

"Do not tell me about the violence of the ravisher, about the persuasiveness of a mother, about the authority of a father, about the influence of relatives, about the intrigues and insolence of servants, or about household [financial] losses. So long as a husband lives, be he adulterer, be he sodomite, be he addicted to every kind of vice, if she left him on account of his crimes, he is her husband still, and she may not take another" (Letters 55:3 [A.D. 396]).

Patristic Era (4th to 8th Century):

In the Patristic era, theologians such as Augustine of Hippo and John Chrysostom emphasized marriage's indissolubility.

John Chrysostom

"What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' See a teacher's wisdom. I mean, that being asked, Is it lawful? He did not at once say, It is not lawful, lest they should be disturbed and put in disorder, but before the decision by His argument, He rendered this manifest, showing that it is itself to the commandment of His Father and that not in opposition to Moses did He enjoin these things, but in full agreement with him. But mark Him arguing strongly not from the creation only, but also from His command. For He said not that He made one man and one woman only, but that He also gave this command that the one man should be joined to the one woman. But if it had been His will that he should put this one away and bring in another, when He had made one man, He would have formed many Women. But now both by the manner of the creation, and by the manner of lawgiving, He showed that one man must dwell with one woman continually, and never break off from her." John Chrysostom, On Matthew 62:1 (A.D. 370).

Augustine:

"Undoubtedly, the substance of the sacrament is of this bond is so that when man and woman have been joined in marriage, they must continue inseparably as long as they live... For this is preserved in the case of Christ and the Church, so that, as a living one with a living one, there is no divorce, no separation forever" (Marriage and Concupiscence 1:10:11 [A.D. 419]).

"In marriage, however, let the blessings of marriage be loved: offspring, fidelity, and the sacramental bond. Offspring, not so much because it may be born, but because it can be reborn, for it is born to punishment unless it be reborn to life. Fidelity, but not such as even the unbelievers have among themselves, ardent as they are for the flesh. . . . The sacramental bond, which they lose neither through separation nor adultery, the spouses should guard chastely and harmoniously" (ibid., 1:17:19).

Medieval Period (9th to 13th Century):

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church significantly influenced views and practices regarding divorce and remarriage. The Church's position aligned with the permanence view, considering marriage an indissoluble sacrament. The Church emphasized strict control over marriage and imposed various regulations and annulment processes to address cases of invalid marriages. Remarriage after divorce was generally prohibited.

Thomas Aquinas

In his *Summa Theologica* he set forth systematically what has become the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on marriage and divorce. Marriage, he declared, "was instituted in the New Law in so far as it represents the mystery of Christ's union with the Church, and in this respect, it is a sacrament of the New Law." Nothing—not even adultery—can dissolve the marriage of two communicants.⁸

The Renaissance Period (14th to 15th)

It was during this time that the Roman Catholic Church began to change its thinking on the issue of divorce and remarriage.

Saint Thomas More

As products of the Renaissance, the Christian humanists attempted to cast off the tradition of the Church and return to the teaching of Scripture. Thomas More, for example, though he lived and died a Roman Catholic and was even canonized by his church, nonetheless held views on marriage and divorce that were contrary to its tradition. (He may have been motivated by having left a life of monkish asceticism to be married!) In his *Utopia*, he suggested that marriage is intended for the pleasure of male and female. He stressed the importance of the marriage bond but held that if a husband and wife could not live in harmony, by mutual consent of both, they should be allowed to divorce and marry someone else. He also believed that unfaithfulness or intolerable behavior by either spouse breaks the marriage bond. At the same time, "breakers of wedlock are punished by the severest grade of slavery" in his *Utopia* and, for a subsequent offense, should be put to death.⁹

Desiderius Erasmus

A contemporary and fellow spirit of Thomas More also held views on marriage and divorce, which were quite radical for his day. He cast scorn on the prohibition of divorce and the idea of an indissoluble marriage bond. Commenting on the Gospel of Matthew, he pointed out that the Church interprets Christ's teachings more narrowly than he did and that such inflexibility is contrary to the general interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. In treating Paul's teaching on divorce, he noted a need to allow for remarriage after divorce for sound causes other than adultery, such as cruelty or mutual hatred. Erasmus maintained, though, that he was not seeking to encourage unnecessary divorces but only to remedy unhappy marriages when all other means had failed.

⁸ https://theologicalstudies.org.uk/article_divorce_snuth.html

⁹ Ibid

Protestant Reformation (14th to 16th Century):

The Protestant Reformation brought about significant changes in the understanding of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. While reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin sought to maintain the permanence view, documents such as the Westminster Confession of Faith recognized additional grounds for divorce.

Luther:

Those who want to be Christians are not to be divorced, but each to retain his or her spouse and bear and experience good and evil with the same, although he or she may be strange, peculiar, and faulty; or, if there be a divorce, that the parties remain unmarried; and that it will not do to make a free thing out of marriage, as if it were in our power to do with it, changing and exchanging, as we please; but it is just as Jesus says: "What God has joined together let not man put asunder."¹⁰

Calvin

Although what relates to divorce was granted in indulgence to the Jews, Christ pronounces that it was never in accordance with the Law because it is directly repugnant to the first institution of God, from whence a perpetual and inviolable rule is to be sought. It is proverbially said that the laws of nature are indissoluble, and God has declared once and for all that, the bond of union between husband and wife is closer than that of parent and child; wherefore, if a son cannot shake off the paternal yoke, no cause can permit the dissolution of the connection which a man has with his wife. Hence it appears how great was the perverseness of that nation, which could not be restrained from dissolving a most sacred and inviolable tie.¹¹

Westminster Confession of 1646.

Chapter XXIV. Marriage and Divorce

V. Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract, (Mat 1:18-20). In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, (Mat 5:31-32): and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead, (Mat 19:9; Rom 7:2-3).

VI. Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage, (Mat 19:8-9; 1Co 7:15; Mat 19:6): wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case, (Deu 24:1-4).¹²

Post-Reformation Era (17th to 19th Century):

As we examine the historical development of the permanence view of marriage, it is important to acknowledge that, over time, certain branches of Christianity have allowed for greater permissiveness regarding divorce and remarriage. One notable example is the Roman Catholic Church, which experienced a shift in its stance on divorce and remarriage.

¹⁰ <https://teleiosministries.com/martin-luther-on-marriage-divorce.html>

¹¹ <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/deuteronomy/24.htm>

¹² https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/ccc/westminster/Of_Marriage_And_Divorce.cfm

The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally held a strict interpretation of the permanence view, affirming the indissolubility of marriage. This position was deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus and reinforced by the early church fathers. However, historical factors and theological developments led to a gradual evolution in the Church's approach.

One significant turning point occurred during the Middle Ages, particularly with the rise of the sacramental understanding of marriage. The Catholic Church increasingly viewed marriage as a sacred institution and elevated it to the status of a sacrament, but in other ways, weakened marriage when annulments were introduced. Unlike a divorce, an annulment declares that a marriage was invalid from its inception, thus rendering it null and void. This allowed for remarriage in cases where the original marriage was deemed invalid.

In subsequent centuries, the Roman Catholic Church further developed its understanding of the grounds for annulment, acknowledging factors such as lack of consent, incapacity, or deception at the time of marriage. The Church established specific procedures and tribunals to examine and declare the nullity of marriages. While this allowed for remarriage in cases of annulment, the Church maintained its stance against divorce as the dissolution of a valid marriage.

Modern Era (20th to 21st Century):

Over the past century, there has been a noticeable shift in societal attitudes towards divorce and remarriage, with a gradual rise in the acceptance of more permissive views. This shift has challenged the traditionally held belief in the permanence of marriage, leading to significant changes in legal frameworks and cultural norms.

The early 20th century witnessed a prevailing emphasis on the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage. Divorce was generally stigmatized and discouraged, and obtaining legal separation was often a complex and arduous process. The prevailing view held that marriage was a lifelong commitment, and divorce was considered a moral and social failure.

However, as societal values and expectations began to evolve, so did attitudes towards divorce and remarriage. Throughout the mid to late 20th century, a combination of factors, such as women's rights movements, economic shifts, and changing cultural norms, contributed to a more permissive view. Legal reforms were enacted in many countries, making divorce more accessible and less stigmatized.

The permissive view of divorce and remarriage gained momentum as concepts such as individual happiness, personal fulfillment, and the right to self-determination became increasingly prioritized. The notion of an unhappy or incompatible marriage being dissolved to allow individuals to pursue greater personal satisfaction gained traction.

This shift in societal attitudes has had a significant impact on divorce rates, which have risen steadily over the last century. Divorce became more socially acceptable and, in many cases, easier to obtain through streamlined legal processes. Remarriage after divorce also became more common, with society recognizing and acknowledging second chances at love and companionship.

A Better Foundation:

While it is valuable to consider the historical perspective of the church on the matter of divorce and remarriage, it would be unwise to disregard the explicit teachings of the Bible regarding this topic. Understanding the biblical stance provides a foundation for shaping religious beliefs and practices surrounding marriage.

Throughout the scriptures, the Bible offers guidance and principles concerning divorce and remarriage. Jesus Himself addressed the issue, emphasizing the significance of the marriage covenant and the seriousness of breaking that bond. In the Gospels, Jesus teaches that divorce was permitted during the betrothal (engagement) period under certain circumstances, such as sexual immorality. Still, it was not the ideal or intended outcome (Matthew 1:19). In Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus underscores the gravity of divorcing one's spouse, leading to making the former spouse a victim of adultery and marrying a divorced person constitutes adultery. Finally, He reaffirms the principle of the permanence of marriage, stating, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

The apostle Paul, in his letters to various early Christian communities, further expounded on the subject. He highlighted the importance of marital faithfulness and discouraged divorce, encouraging couples to work towards reconciliation whenever possible. Paul acknowledged that in cases of abandonment by an unbelieving spouse, the believing partner was not bound to the marriage, allowing for the possibility of remarriage (1 Corinthians 7:15).

The Sanctity of Marriage:

The Bible teaches that marriage is a sacred covenant established by God (Genesis 2:24; Malachi 2:14). Jesus reiterated this truth when He said, "Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mark 10:9). Marriage is designed to be a lifelong commitment, reflecting the unconditional love and faithfulness of Christ to His Church (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Genesis 2:24:

In the opening chapters of the Bible, God establishes the foundation of marriage, declaring, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This verse underscores the unity and inseparability of the husband and wife, pointing to a lifelong commitment.

Malachi 2:16:

The book of Malachi presents God's displeasure with divorce, stating, "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence." This passage depicts divorce as an act of faithlessness and violence against the marriage covenant.

Matthew 19:4-6:

Jesus reaffirms the permanence of marriage by referring to the creation account, saying, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Quoting from Genesis 2:24, Jesus emphasizes the divine institution of marriage, which is intended to be a lifelong union.

Mark 10:9:

Echoing the sentiments expressed in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reiterates, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Here, Jesus reinforces the idea that humans should not seek to dissolve the bond that God has established in marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11:

The Apostle Paul addresses the issue of marriage and divorce, providing guidance to the Corinthian believers. He instructs, "To the married, I give this charge: not I, but the Lord: the wife should not separate from her husband... and the husband should not divorce his wife." Paul emphasizes the importance of marital commitment and encourages reconciliation rather than divorce.

While recognizing the reality of human brokenness, the Bible presents divorce as a departure from God's ideal for marriage (Matthew 19:8). Jesus emphasized that divorce was permitted under the Mosaic Law due to the hardness of people's hearts but clarified that it was not part of God's original plan (Matthew 19:3–9).

Where Does VBC Stand: The Permanence View of Marriage:

Village Bible Church adheres firmly to the permanence position on marriage, based on the biblical foundation and historical teachings of the universal church. According to this position, remarriage after divorce is not permitted as long as the first spouse is alive and not remarried. This aligns with the belief in the lifelong commitment of marriage, as established in Scripture.

The permanence position reflects a deep respect for God's design for marriage, recognizing it as a sacred covenant before Him rather than a mere contract. Village Bible Church acknowledges the impact of divorce on individuals, families, and the community. It seeks to uphold the sanctity of marriage by providing guidance and support to couples during marital struggles.

By affirming the permanence position, Village Bible Church honors the teachings of Jesus, who emphasized the indissoluble nature of the marital bond. Jesus stated, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9), forming the basis for the church's commitment to fostering an environment that encourages reconciliation and the preservation of marital commitment.

The permanence position also finds support in the historical teachings of the church, as Christian theologians and leaders throughout the centuries have consistently upheld the sanctity and permanence of marriage. This position is rooted in the wisdom and guidance passed down through generations, recognizing the importance of marital fidelity and commitment.

While Village Bible Church maintains the permanence position as its stance, it acknowledges the complexities of individual circumstances and the need for pastoral care and discernment in addressing issues of divorce and remarriage. The church aims to provide grace, understanding, and support to those affected by divorce while remaining faithful to biblical principles.

As a community, Village Bible Church strives to create an environment that supports and guides couples through the challenges of marriage. Through preaching, study materials, and pastoral counsel, the church emphasizes the permanence view, encouraging perseverance, reconciliation, and finding support within the church community.

The Guiding Elder Team recognizes that the permanence view may be perceived as unfair or unloving in contemporary society. However, the church believes that this view represents the best response to the teachings of Christ. By upholding Jesus' words on the indissolubility of the marital bond, the church aligns its teachings with the authority of Scripture and Christ's example.

Additionally, Village Bible Church acknowledges the VBC Membership Commitments, which emphasize members' desire and diligence to preserve their marriages. This commitment is a unifying principle,

encouraging members to pray, support, and equip one another to honor God in their marriages. By affirming the permanence view and incorporating it into the church's teaching, counseling, and community life, the church aims to provide a strong foundation for couples, promote healthy marriages, and foster a culture of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The church firmly believes that by upholding God's design for marriage, individuals and families can experience the abundant life and blessings that come from obedience to His Word.

For Our Divorced and Remarried Members?

When advising Village Bible Church members who have experienced divorce, the elders stress a compassionate and forward-looking approach. They urge these individuals to avoid dwelling on past wounds and instead concentrate on cultivating love and forgiveness. They must grasp that healing and personal growth often result from letting go of past grievances and embracing a brighter future.

Moreover, the elders underscore the importance of leaving room for reconciliation, even when it may seem distant or unlikely. They remind divorced members that forgiveness and God's transformative grace can mend relationships and rebuild broken bonds. By maintaining an open heart and a willingness to work towards reconciliation, these members can exemplify the hope and restoration message held dear by Village Bible Church.

The elders provide guidance not only to remarried members but also extend their support to those who have gone through divorce. In alignment with biblical teachings found in Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:9, our elders emphasize the sanctity and enduring nature of marriage. These scriptures are foundational in guiding our understanding that any dissolution of marriage and subsequent remarriage is regarded as an act of one-time adultery. Matthew 5:31-32 underscores the gravity of divorcing one's spouse, leading to making the former spouse a victim of adultery and marrying a divorced person constitutes adultery. Similarly, Matthew 19:9 reinforces the permanence of marriage by stating that marrying another after a divorce is tantamount to adultery. Therefore, members who have experienced divorce are to understand the weightiness of remarriage within this biblical context. The emphasis is placed on honoring the original marriage commitment and understanding that subsequent marriages begin in a place that is in contradiction to the mandates of the biblical teaching.

That said, we firmly believe in the transformative power of God's forgiveness and grace. It's fundamental to recognize that no sin is beyond the scope of God's forgiveness, including the complexities surrounding divorce and remarriage. Our understanding aligns with the biblical principle that God's forgiveness knows no bounds. When individuals seek repentance and surrender their sins to God, He, in His faithfulness, extends His forgiveness. As flawed individuals in need of God's grace, we find solace in knowing that His forgiveness is available to all who earnestly seek it and are willing to turn their hearts toward Him.

The church is vital in offering guidance and assistance to divorced and remarried members. While the elders recognize that their active assistance is limited to current marriages, they understand the importance of welcoming and encouraging those who have been remarried to pursue God-honoring relationships with their current spouses. As a church, we believe that those who have been involved in divorce carry no "scarlet letter" and, like all other members, have the potential to serve and participate in all areas of church ministry. In this, we kindly remind members impacted by divorce and remarriage that, like all sinners, Jesus' forgiveness says that we are not defined by our past but by the present and future we are building. We stress the significance of nurturing and cherishing our commitment to our current spouses and seek to live upright and holy lives.

Weddings At Village

At Village Bible Church, the understanding of weddings is rooted in the teachings of Scripture. It is recognized that God's presence is central to the wedding ceremony, making it a worship service. Therefore, weddings are considered a function of the local church and are available to active members of Village Bible Church in good standing.

The Bible cautions against the marriage of a Christian and a non-Christian, emphasizing the importance of being equally yoked. Per this teaching, Village Bible Church will not perform wedding ceremonies for unequally yoked couples.

The church also values the counsel of others, particularly parents or trusted individuals in positions of authority, who may have legitimate concerns or disapproval of the wedding. Such counsel will be taken seriously and considered before approving a wedding.

Recognizing that marriage is intended to be a lifelong commitment, Village Bible Church will not perform weddings for individuals with a former living spouse who has not remarried.

To ensure that the wedding reflects the nature of the church fellowship, an elder or pastor from Village Bible Church will be involved in the wedding process. If a couple wishes to have an elder or pastor from another church perform the wedding, their involvement must be approved by the Guiding Elders.

Above all, Village Bible Church emphasizes the importance of reflection and discussion regarding the role of Jesus Christ in one's life, commitment to follow Him, and how faith can nurture and encourage the couple in their marriage. The church seeks assurance that the couple subscribes to Christian concepts for marriage both in principle and practice. The pastoral staff and elders at Village Bible Church consider the task of officiating weddings as a significant and sacred responsibility. They approach each ceremony with deep reverence and a commitment to upholding the sanctity of marriage. While they celebrate the love and joyous union of couples, they also hold steadfast to the belief in the lifelong commitment of marriage.

In line with this belief, the VBC staff and elders have established a policy that they will not officiate remarriages except in cases where the previous spouse has passed away or remarried. By adhering to this principle, the church aims to uphold the integrity and sacredness of the marital bond. Furthermore, the church buildings themselves serve as tangible reflections of the teachings and values upheld by its members. Therefore, utilizing Village Bible Church facilities and properties for any wedding events, such as, but not limited to, engagement parties, bridal showers, ceremonies, and receptions, must be in accordance with our policies in this document and the [**Building use policy and procedures**](#).

What if I come to a different perspective?

The Guiding Elders understand that within the body of believers, some members may hold differing convictions on the permanence of marriage, even if it goes against the stated position of the church and the conviction of the elders. These convictions may be based on their interpretation of Scripture, personal experiences, or specific circumstances they have faced. We acknowledge and respect the freedom of conviction among its members regarding some secondary areas of biblical doctrine and teaching. Much of this disagreement

comes not because of the ambiguity of the biblical text but from cultural pressure and lack of in-depth study regarding the Bible's teaching on marriage.

To approach this process with a humble and teachable spirit, individuals considering divorce and/or remarriage are kindly asked to give time and attention to the permanence position by reading the book [Divorce and Remarriage: A Permanence View](#) by Jim Eliff and Daryl Winegard and completing the corresponding study guide. This resource provides a comprehensive exploration of the biblical teachings on divorce and remarriage, arguing that Jesus did not allow divorce for any reason and did not permit remarriage if a former spouse was living and not remarried.

This view can be encapsulated in the following three statements:

- The one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death.
- Initiating a divorce is never lawful.
- Remarrying after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living and not remarried.

While individuals may have differing convictions, the church encourages a sincere examination of these biblical teachings and a willingness to engage with the theological arguments presented in the book. This process of study and reflection is designed to foster a deeper understanding of the permanence view and to engage in thoughtful dialogue with the elders regarding personal convictions regarding the Bible's teachings on divorce and remarriage.

As individuals engage in this process, they will seek an open and honest discussion with the elders of our church. This will involve meeting with elders (assigned by your campus pastor) to share their personal convictions, explain their understanding of the biblical teachings, and seek guidance and pastoral counsel in light of their circumstances. The church values this opportunity for dialogue and recognizes the importance of fostering mutual respect and understanding, even when there may be differing convictions.

Through this process, Village Bible Church aims to encourage individuals to approach their convictions with humility, openness to learning, and a desire to align their beliefs with biblical truth. The church recognizes that personal journeys may differ. Still, by engaging in study, dialogue, and prayerful consideration, individuals can grow in their understanding of God's design for marriage and seek His guidance in their decision-making.

Upon the completion of the process outlined above, if an individual has sincerely engaged in studying the permanence view of marriage, biblically expressed their personal convictions regarding divorce and remarriage to the elders of Village Bible Church, and sought guidance and pastoral counsel, the elders may, in their discretion, grant the individual a concession to pursue their personal convictions in this matter. In this circumstance, the elders affirm that the individual will not face any discipline or recourse from the elders or other members of Village Bible Church. However, in these circumstances, the elders still prohibit the use or involvement of church leadership and facilities. The church recognizes that there may be genuine differences in understanding and convictions on this issue, even among faithful believers, and respects the individual's conscience and personal journey.

It is important to note that this concession does not imply a change in the church's official position on divorce and remarriage. Rather, the church's response, in this case, should be viewed as an earnest attempt to shepherd their flock with compassion, recognizing the individual's journey and convictions while staying true to

the biblical text. It reflects a commitment to unity within the body of believers, even amidst differences of interpretation and conviction.

This concession does not endorse a broader shift in the church's stance on other marriage-related cultural issues. The elders and leadership of the church affirm their commitment to remaining steadfast in their adherence to the biblical text, upholding the teachings and principles it espouses. The decision to extend grace and understanding in this particular circumstance should not be misconstrued as a softening of the church's position on other contentious topics, such as same-sex marriages or other cultural shifts. The church holds firm to its convictions, guided by a deep reverence for Scripture and the pursuit of biblical truth.

The church remains dedicated to providing sound biblical teaching, pastoral care, and support for its members, encouraging them to seek wisdom and discernment in all matters of faith and life. The church seeks to maintain its fidelity to the biblical text while extending grace and understanding to those on different paths within divorce and remarriage.

In conclusion, this paper has explored the intricate dynamics of divorce and remarriage within the context of Village Bible Church. By emphasizing the importance of adhering to scriptures rather than succumbing to cultural trends, the church can establish a strong moral compass for addressing marital difficulties. The church's unwavering commitment to serving individuals in the throes of these challenges demonstrates its deep compassion and dedication to supporting our members.

Through clear and consistent guidance, Village Bible Church can effectively serve as a pillar of strength and guidance for its community. The church must prioritize the well-being of its members and promote a comprehensive approach to relationships based on the teachings of the Bible. Additionally, Village Bible Church strongly desires to speak and lead humbly and graciously, recognizing the complex and sensitive nature of divorce and remarriage. By extending grace and understanding, the church provides a space where individuals can find solace, healing, and restoration, ultimately nurturing a community that reflects the heart of Christ in its interactions and decision-making processes.

VBC Guiding Elder Team