

The Bible says that the institution of marriage was created by God (Genesis 2:21-25). We believe God's Word should be our authority for defining marriage and setting the boundaries for the marriage relationship. The Bible says that God intends for marriage to be a monogamous, life-long, loving relationship between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:6). Marriage is the highest of all human relationships, provided by God as the best environment for relational intimacy (Genesis 2:18, 25) and child rearing (Genesis 1:27-28). The love between a husband and a wife is to be an illustration of the love and faithfulness between God and his people (Malachi 2:13-16, Ephesians 5:22-33).

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), but because of the influence of sin in the world (Jesus called it "the hardness of your hearts" in Matthew 19:8), the Bible makes some concessions for divorce and remarriage. Scripture gives two justifiable reasons for divorce: adultery (Matthew 19:9) and abandonment (1 Corinthians 7:15). Divorce is allowable in the case of marital unfaithfulness because the marriage covenant has been broken, but this is a concession and not a command. God still hates divorce, and if possible, if the unfaithful spouse is repentant and willing to recommit to the marriage, we encourage the innocent party to forgive and seek restoration.

Scripture identifies several scenarios under which a person who has been previously married may marry again.

- * The former spouse has died (1 Corinthians 7:39).
- * The divorce occurred prior to a saving relationship with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- * Abandonment by the former spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15).
- * Adultery broke the marriage covenant (Matthew 19:9). When the one desiring to remarry was the guilty party, there must first be signs of repentance and a desire to reconcile with his or her former spouse. If the former spouse is unable or unwilling to reconcile, then after prayer and godly counsel the person can remarry.

Our church leaders recognize that these biblical parameters do not allow divorce under other circumstances where divorce might seem warranted. The Bible does make a distinction between physical separation and divorce (1 Corinthians 7:5). Our church leaders recommend that couples see wise Christian counsel in these types of difficult situations, to determine if physical separation may be warranted until a Godly counselor advises otherwise. The grace of Christ can be extended to those who have been divorced for unbiblical reasons. Those who have made wrong decisions in the past cannot undo their mistakes but must be faithful and honor Christ in their current situation.

Questions often arise as to whether a person who has been divorced is eligible for a leadership position at Central. Because the Scripture says that an elder must be "the

husband of but one wife” (I Timothy 3:2 – literally states, “a one-woman man”), some contend that a person desiring to be an elder or minister in the Church must not have been divorced. It is our position that a divorce in a person’s past does not automatically exclude him from future church leadership. The passage in I Timothy 3 also says that an elder must not be given to drunkenness or violence. Most Christians agree that if a man got drunk or was in a fight many years ago as a youngster, that event should not disqualify him from leadership in his later years. The nature of circumstances of the offense and the length of time of proven credibility should all be considered in determining whether a person is qualified for a leadership position. The same should apply to a person’s past divorce. If murder didn’t disqualify Paul from becoming an apostle and missionary after a decade of proven credibility, a divorce in someone’s past shouldn’t automatically disqualify that person from serving as a church leader. Because of these precedents in scripture Central does not disqualify partners from becoming an elder simply on the grounds of having been previously divorced.

Our Central leadership provides guidance and help to protect the partners of our church from the trauma of divorce and to hold high the ideals of biblical marriage and sexual purity. We offer premarital counseling for couples at our church by one of our ministers. We frequently preach about marriage and promote marriage enrichment seminars and connect groups to our church attendees.

Central Christian Church considers the Bible the inspired Word of God and therefore our guide in matters of sex and marriage. The Bible says that the only proper place for sexual expression is marriage (Hebrews 13:4). Any sexual relationship outside of marriage - whether premarital, extramarital, or homosexual - is considered by the Bible as sin. Therefore, the leadership of Central Christian Church believes that cohabitation is not in line with God’s Biblical teachings and/or commands. Even when a cohabiting relationship is intended to be platonic and/or celibate, the circumstance often invites too much temptation for sexual sin (I Corinthians 6:18) and may be a poor example for non-believers and compromise one’s Christian witness. According to the Bible, Christians must live in a manner distinct from that of the world. Christians are commanded to hold to a higher standard of moral virtue and purity, guided by the principles of God’s Holy Word. It is out of love that the leadership of Central educates and encourages our church partners to reflect Christ’s love for the church in their relationships and marriages.