

## Protocol re Divorce and Re-Marriage:

As elders of the church we are given the charge to shepherd the flock by exercising oversight (I Peter 5:2), by being examples to the flock (I Peter 5:3), by watching over their souls as those who will give an account (Heb. 13:17), by paying careful attention to ourselves and all the flock (Acts 20:28), to care for the church of God (Acts 20:28), to be alert (Acts 20:31).

It is important then that as elders of the church, we carefully pay attention not just to the health of marriages in our congregation, but also to those who are going through the process of divorce and potentially re-marriage. Christ addresses this in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:1-12, as well as Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18. Paul addresses these issues in I Corinthians 7. As those who are called to watch over souls and the ministry of the Word to souls, it is the duty of elders to be involved in the lives of members. Marriage, divorce and re-marriage, are all very spiritual matters and are clearly connected into the care of souls.

Briefly, we also need to make a distinction between how we disciple confessing members and communicant members. We owe a certain level of Biblical discipleship to communicant members. They are part of our fellowship and they are coming to the Table. Yet there are distinct duties that come with confessing membership, since confessing members make a particular vow to submit to the government and discipline of the church. And the church makes a particular vow to them, in this regard. What is laid out refers in particular to confessing membership.

Of course, there are many different situations when it comes to divorce and re-marriage and Biblical wisdom is needed in every situation. To some degree we must appeal to Scripture on a case by case basis. We must make judgments based on the particulars of a situation. But we also want to be careful in this about creating loopholes in Scripture.

Nevertheless, it is worth establishing some basic guidelines to work with.

1. We recognize four primary categories in Scripture with regards to divorce & remarriage. Marriage is a state where a man and wife are formally bound in covenant and living together. Separation is a state where a couple is still formally bound in covenant, but living apart (I Cor. 7:10-11). Divorce is a state where a couple are no longer formally bound in covenant and living apart (Matthew 19:8-9). Remarriage is a state where one was once formally bound in covenant, that state of marriage was formally severed, and the individual wants to enter into a new covenant (Scripture seems to imply that re-marriage is permitted at times, but the driving force of Scripture is towards Biblical reconciliation - I Cor. 7).
  - For more on what *Biblical* reconciliation looks like we would refer you to the book "How to be Free from Bitterness" by Jim Wilson. You can find it on Amazon here: [https://www.amazon.ca/How-Free-Bitterness-Jim-Wilson-ebook/dp/B0791ND5M9/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crid=570MYCZ0GJDU&keywords=how+to+be+free+from+bitterness&qid=1696609976&srefix=How+to+be+free+from+%2Caps%2C161&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.ca/How-Free-Bitterness-Jim-Wilson-ebook/dp/B0791ND5M9/ref=sr_1_2?crid=570MYCZ0GJDU&keywords=how+to+be+free+from+bitterness&qid=1696609976&srefix=How+to+be+free+from+%2Caps%2C161&sr=8-2)

2. When someone comes to the church following a divorce/separation, or a divorce/separation happens in the marriage of a member family of the church, an elder (or pastor) along with the elders in session shall take care to discern that this is a lawful divorce/separation and not an unlawful divorce/separation based on Biblical criteria.
3. In the case of a lawful divorce, an elder (or pastor) should seek to discern with prayer and the Word of God where each individual needs to confess sin and grow in holiness.
4. There are cases where the marriage is covenantally broken. For example, in the case of sexual immorality or abandonment (Matt. 5:31-32, 19:1-12, I Cor. 7:15). Nevertheless, even after there is a breaking of the covenant, Biblical reconciliation is still possible (I Cor. 7:11). For the sake of objectivity, and to do our duty to avoid occasions for slander, an elder (or pastor) shall warn a man or a woman about the wisdom of pursuing another, until legally divorced, which clearly indicates the end of a marriage.
5. In the practice of shepherding the soul of a member, the session of Christ Covenant Church shall include:
  - a. Teaching and admonishment from the word
  - b. Warnings, corrections, and council regarding future relationships
  - c. The offer of an elder (or pastor) to walk through the legal process of divorce with the member.