

Marriage Policy

Approved by the Diaconate on March 13, 2012

I - Definition & Description

- 1) The final authority in all matters, including marriage and sexuality, is the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures, which is the very written word of God.¹
 - a) Based in the firm conviction of the authority of Scripture, this policy is a humble attempt to affirm and apply biblical principles to the Lord's church here in Winsted, CT.
 - b) The church, especially her leaders, should be ever vigilant to encourage biblical sexual morality and defend the institute of Christian marriage among the flock in this fallen world through the charity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.²
- 2) With the exception of the church, marriage is the most important social institution and is more important than an individual's happiness.³
- 3) Sexual morality is clearly defined in Scripture.⁴
 - a) Sex is special, not merely physical. It is part of, and leads to creation.
 - b) Because sex is special, it is reserved only for the marriage covenant.
 - c) Within marriage there is only monogamy. Outside of marriage there is total abstinence.
- 4) Jesus Christ is the exemplar for marriage and being single, both of which are godly callings.⁵
- 5) Marriage is a union between one single adult man and one single adult woman, who are not blood related.⁶
 - a) Marriage is intended to be a lifelong covenant.⁷
 - b) Christians should only marry fellow Christians.⁸
 - c) Homosexuality is a sexual sin.⁹ Therefore, according to the Scriptures "same-sex marriages" will not be performed in this church.

¹ Ex 34:27-28; Ps 119; Mark 7:1-13; 12:24-37; Luke 16:29-31; Rom 15:4; Eph 2:20; 1Thes 2:13; 2Tim 3:14-4:5; Heb 1:1-2; 2Pet 1:19-21; 3:14-16; Rev 22:18-19.

² 1Cor 7:38; 1Tim 4:1-3; Heb 13:4.

³ Gen 1:27-30; Mark 8:34-38; 1Cor 7:14-16; Eph 5:21ff; Phil 1:29; 2Tim 3:2-7; Heb 13:4.

⁴ Ex 20:14; Matt 19:4-6,18; Rom 13:13; 1Cor 6:9; Gal 5:19-21; 1Tim 3:2,12; Heb 13:4; 1Pet 4:3.

⁵ Matt 19:10-12; 1Cor 7:8,26; Eph 5:28-32; Rev 19:7-9; 21:2,9,17. While Jesus never had a wife, He is married to the church. That is why earthly marriage is a figure of the eternal union that is between Christ the bridegroom and the Church, His bride. (Eph 5:28-32; Rev 19:7-9; 21:2,9,17)

⁶ Lev 18; Amos 2:7; Mark 6:18; 1Cor 5:1.

⁷ Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5-6.

⁸ Gen 34:14; Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3-4; 1Kgs 11:4; Neh 13:25-27; Mal 2:11-12; 2Cor 6:14.

⁹ Lev 18:22; 20:13; Deut 23:18; Rom 1:26-27; 1Cor 6:9; 1Tim 1:9-10.

- 6) The purpose of marriage is:
- a) For the mutual help and completion of husband and wife.¹⁰
 - b) If so granted by the Almighty, to produce children to bring into Christ's Church.¹¹
 - c) To prevent immorality.¹²
 - d) To signify a mystical union that is between Christ and His Church.¹³
- 7) Though marriage is a very important divinely ordained institution, it is not a sacrament. It is not directly commanded for all Christians by the Lord Jesus Christ and it doesn't directly communicate the Gospel.
- 8) God hates divorce and divorce is discouraged by the church.¹⁴
- a) The Old Testament (OT) allowed for divorce for adultery, abandonment, neglect and abuse, and for possibility for subsequent remarriage.¹⁵
 - b) The New Testament (NT) doesn't change the OT teaching on divorce and remarriage.¹⁶
 - i) The NT puts a stronger emphasis on avoiding divorce and focusing on forgiveness and reconciliation, as befitting the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - ii) While adultery and abandonment are easier to prove, neglect and abuse should only be interpreted in the most conservative and strict sense.
 - iii) A guilty spouse shouldn't be automatically divorced, even for the sin of adultery.
 - iv) A Christian should only seek divorce when there is willful and consistent refusal of the guilty partner to repent and be reconciled.
 - v) If a Christian has a biblically lawful divorce as outlined above, he or she is free to remarry.

¹⁰ Gen 2:18; Gen 2:23.

¹¹ Mal 2:15.

¹² 1Cor 7:2,9.

¹³ Jer 3; Ezek 16; Hos 1-3; SoS; Eph 5:22-23.

¹⁴ Mal 2:15-16.

¹⁵ Ex 21:10-11; Deut 24:1-4. Examples of lawful divorces in the Bible, including: Abraham (Gen 21:9-14), faithful Jews with their pagan wives (Ezra 10:3,19), God's divorce of the Northern Kingdom of Samaria (Jer 3:8; Hos 2:2-7) and Joseph's planned divorce of Mary. (Matt 1:19-25)

¹⁶ Matthew 5:31-32, when read in context (i.e. v.17-48), teaches the impossibility of the ideal standard of the law and thus is to drive the reader to the cross. This section presupposes that such things as anger, lust, divorce, lying, arrogance and hatred will happen, but should be avoid.

Matthew 19:3-12 and 1Corinthians 7:10-11 do not fundamentally change the OT standards for divorce and remarriage, but are dealing with particular ancient debates about liberalizing divorce and remarriage that were common among 1st century Jews and Greco-Romans.

II – Administration

- 1) Under normal circumstances the ordinance of Christian marriage should be reserved for members of the body of Christ.
 - a) When one of the couple is from another biblically based church, the blessing of that church should be sought by contacting the pastor of that church.
 - b) Couples not active in a local body, but seeking marriage in the church, will be first encouraged to regularly attend the church before a Christian marriage ceremony is performed.
 - c) The decision on whether any particular wedding at the church is appropriate is up to the pastor(s) who may seek the counsel of the Diaconate.
 - d) Outside clergy can be used for a wedding service at Second Congregational Church, with the approval of the pastor(s).
- 2) In order to encourage a couple in the kind of marriage designed by God, they will be asked to participate in at least four premarital counseling sessions. During these sessions, the couple will explore the distinctiveness of Christian marriage and the good news of Jesus Christ.
- 3) A wedding service in the church is first and foremost a worship service. A proper sense of worship is best attained with traditionally worded vows and with appropriate music.