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West Side Church Position on Marriage and Sexual Morality

Marriage is a fundamental institution in human society. It was established by God at creation when God created the first human beings as “male and female” (Genesis 1:27) and then said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Marriage is defined by God as “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame

(Genesis 2:24-25).” Unfortunately there is much confusion in our world regarding relationships. What about single people? Is it okay to get a divorce? Under what circumstances can I get remarried? At West Side we seek to submit to the authority of Scripture to govern our statements and positions. This document seeks to bring clarity to what the Bible says about these issues.

West Side Church Position on Singleness

Summary

We believe that people who are single are valued by God. Everyone must be single at some point in their life. Those who are single should see this as an opportunity to live for Jesus Christ. Single people should not be thought of as incomplete and looking for their other half, but whole people who are complete in their identity in Christ.

Most Relevant Bible Passages

- 1 Corinthians 7:1-40
- Isaiah 56:3-5
- Matthew 19:11-12

Position Explained

The position of the Bible concerning singleness is understood by West Side’s spiritual leaders to be as follows:

How Many People Are Single?

Marriage is happening later in life than it did just twenty years ago. In 2002, only 12% of men and 22% of women under the age of 25 were married. Because of divorce and a growing number of people who choose not to get married, one third of all people who are in their 30’s and 40’s are currently not married. In 1996, the Census Bureau stated that 47% of the American population was living single because they were unmarried, widowed, divorced, or married with their spouse being absent. We share this because many single people feel alone in the church. The reality is that they are almost the majority of our society.¹

Is It Acceptable To Be Single?

In Genesis 1 God creates the world and everything is good. In Genesis 2:18 we see the first thing that is not good, and that is to be alone. God creates marriage as the solution. God does not create the fraternity, community group, or club, but He creates marriage, and it is good to get married. We also see in 1 Corinthians 7:1 that, "It is good for a man not to marry."

¹Statistics taken from *After the Baby Boomers* by Robert Wuthnow page 21-23. And from *Singles at the Crossroads* by Albert Y. Hsu page 13 – 31.

So, just as it is good to be married, it is also good to be single. To the single person who is struggling by being alone we would encourage them to find comfort in the community of the church. When Jesus saves us He adopts us into His family so that we can love one another and serve His church.

Jesus was single and spoke about when it was acceptable to be single. In Matthew 19:11-12 Jesus shares a difficult message. The main reason why some will choose to remain unmarried is to do a job that requires a single devotion to God or because of special circumstances. This is when someone voluntarily chooses to devote their life to God. While God calls all of His followers to live for Him in all that they do, some people seek to do it without the added burden of raising a family.

Is It Better To Be Single Or Married?

One state is not better than the other. In church history many leaders have exalted singleness as a form of godliness, and today some exalt married life. In ancient Jewish culture marriage was highly valued. To be single and childless was seen as a curse to some, but God had a special message for single people who lived in a culture that over-valued marriage. In Isaiah 56:3-5, God clearly states that those who are single and follow Him will not be forgotten. God will bless them with an everlasting name and they will be full members of the family of God.

If you find yourself single right now you should find joy in the advantages of your current state. There are many blessings that the single life brings. 1 Corinthians 7:32-34 states that a single person is free from the concerns of raising a family, pleasing a spouse, or feeling like they are cheating their family when they give their all to God. This is an incredibly freeing verse. Yes, single people need rest, vacations, and a healthy social life just like anyone, but a single person is able to pursue the dreams God has given them more easily when compared to a married person.

Is It Possible For A Single Person To Remain Sexually Pure?

Yes it is. While sexual desires are very strong, God's Word continually calls us to "put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). As Christians we are called to not look at that which causes us to be aroused, to not go to the places that will tempt us, and to not use our hands to touch what we should not touch. Jesus Christ has given us new life so that we can be holy ambassadors for Him in our world. Nowhere in Scripture does it say it is acceptable to give into sexual sin just because the temptation is too strong.

It is because we are called to be pure, that we should not live with a person of the opposite gender prior to marriage. Doing so would be setting yourself up for failure. Society says to restrain from sex is dehumanizing, but God states that sex is for marriage. Romans 8:13 says, "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live." Our culture states "to be free you can have sex with anyone," but sex outside of marriage is spiritual death. To live a truly fulfilled and satisfied life a person must seek the things of God and humbly follow Him.

What If I Love Someone, I Am Willing To Commit To That Person, But It Would Be A Hardship For Us To Get Married? What If My Taxes Would Increase? What If The Laws Of The Land Do Not Value Marriage? Can I Live With Someone And Remain Legally Single, But "Married In God's Eyes?"

While we understand that the laws of the land are not always in favor of marriage, we believe in a higher authority than the US government. You should get married. God calls for a husband to sacrificially love his wife. This love is greater than any tax barrier, 401K plan, or local law. We should not live with deceit toward our government, insurance agencies, or pension plan. It would be honoring toward God if you were to get married.

West Side Church Position on Marriage

Summary

We believe that God instituted marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman before God. God designed the marriage relationship to be a lifelong partnership. In this partnership, He desires to bring blessing and growth in the physical and the spiritual lives of both the husband and wife.

Most Relevant Bible Passages

- Genesis 2:20b-25
- Ephesians 5:21-33
- Proverbs 18:22

The Position Explained

The position of the Bible concerning marriage is understood by West Side's spiritual leaders to be as follows:

Why Did God Choose Marriage?

When God created humanity, He created them "in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). Men and women are unique creations in the image of God. And marriage was created for the relationship between the two. In Genesis 2:18, God decided that it was "not good for the man to be alone," so He created a helper, Eve, to be Adam's wife. Proverbs 18:22 says: "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD."

God intends this relationship not just for mutual help and fulfillment, but also for the setting in which to have a family. Jesus addresses God's design and blessing of the marriage relationship in Matthew 19:5-6a: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one." We see in this Scripture that God's design of marriage is the joining of one man and one woman. All other attempts at marriage unions are not blessed by God (sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, polygamy, etc.).

Who Should I Marry?

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ you should marry another follower of Jesus Christ since marriage is a physical and spiritual union. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 6:14; "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" As Christians we seek to live in righteousness. To enter into marriage with a person who does not share the life of Christ is setting you up for hardship.

Why Should I Marry?

Marriage is a covenant before God. A man and a woman should become married if they desire to commit to live together and support one another in a lifelong, exclusive relationship. Marriage must be founded on the

deepest levels of sacrificial love, not just on feelings.

When Should I Marry?

The marriage relationship should not be rushed into, because it is a serious commitment. Healthy marriage requires maturity on both sides. A man should be ready to provide for his family if he is looking to get married. At West Side, we require pre-marital counseling as an important part of the preparation for marriage.

How Does Marriage Affect My Spiritual Life?

The marriage relationship does not bring salvation, and it is not a sacrament that needs to be fulfilled. We believe the marriage relationship is used as an illustration of Christ's relationship with the Church. This illustration shows the leadership of Jesus Christ, His love for the Church, and the unity between husband and wife as an example of the deeper bond between Christ and His Church.

West Side Church Responses to Marriage Issues

Summary

We believe that a good marriage can at times be difficult. In those difficult times, God calls both husbands and wives to a high standard. When difficult issues arise in a marriage, the husband and wife need to approach the problem, or problems, with a mindset that does not consider separation or divorce. Separation, whether it is legal or physical, involves the division of a married couple and it displeases God. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 says, "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): a wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife."

Most Relevant Bible Passages

- I Corinthians 7:2-3, 10-11
- Ephesians 5:22-33
- I Peter 3:1-7
- Hebrews 13:4
- I Thessalonians 5:7
- Jude 16

Position Explained

The position of the Bible concerning responses to marriage issues is understood by West Side's spiritual leaders to be as follows:

What Are Some Issues That May Cause A Marriage To Struggle?

A good marriage requires effort. I Peter 3:7 in the NIV uses the word "considerate" and the NASV uses the words "in an understanding way." Both indicate that an effort is required to really "know" your spouse. "Knowing" requires all aspects of intimacy: physical, sexual, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional. The better you understand your life partner in these five areas, the more immune your marriage is to divisive issues. However, when you spend so much time with another person, you will encounter certain characteristics about them that may irritate or bother you in some way. This is when your efforts, patience and God's grace

are most required.

1. **Priorities:** For a marriage to be successful, the spouse and the marriage relationship need to be a priority. Ephesians 5:15-17 states, "Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." When you treat your career, hobbies, favorite pastimes and children as more important than your spouse, you are doomed for failure in your relationship. Make your spouse the priority and that joy and contentment will trickle down into everything else you love about your life.
2. **Emotional Isolation:** Husbands and wives need to be emotionally available to each other. 1 Peter 3:7 says, "Live with your wives in an understanding way..." Men need to be good listeners, empathetic to their wives' needs rather than just trying to "fix" their problems. Men need to be aware of the common tendency to emotionally pull away from their wives. Women need to be empathetic to the stresses men put on themselves to be strong and successful. Simple words of affirmation may go a long way. Women need to be aware that being critical of their spouse may cause them to become emotionally isolated.
3. **Discouragement:** Both men and women need to avoid demeaning, discouraging comments. Discouragement is the lack of affirmation and encouragement in the relationship. Believers are called in 1 Thessalonians 5:7 to, "...encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." Using demeaning comments toward your spouse and withholding your honor, respect and encouragement will lead to discouragement and bitterness, which is the opposite of encouragement.
4. **Criticism:** Being critical of a loved one is another way to destroy a marriage. Constant criticism or a critical spirit can cause a rift between husband and wife. Some people wish they had married the "perfect spouse," but there are no perfect relationships nor is any one individual perfect, other than Christ. The ideal marriage involves both the husband and the wife giving their best. Ephesians 5:28-29 says, "In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church." Accept the faults and shortcomings of your spouse. It is part of the package that brought you together. Instead, pursue change in your own life, what you can control, rather than trying to change your spouse.
5. **Dishonesty:** Maintaining a strong bond with your spouse requires integrity. Integrity manifests itself in many different areas of life. The most important is honesty: "Say what you mean, mean what you say." Proverbs 11:3 says, "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity."
6. **Infidelity:** Infidelity is a betrayal of trust and sends the message that marriage is unimportant. Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." The God-established standard for marriage is laid out in many passages from Exodus 20:14 to 1 Corinthians 7:2-5. God intends for us to follow His standard because infidelity is always a sin and needs to be avoided.
7. **Abuse:** Abuse of all kinds destroys relationships. The Bible clearly warns us about the dangers of an angry man. Proverbs 22:24 says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man." Proverbs 29:22 says, "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression." Abuse can take many forms but the most common are verbal, physical, emotional and sexual. None of these have a place in the life of any believer.

It is not God's will for any person to be in an abusive relationship. Angry and critical words or other abusive acts destroy confidence and self-esteem. Being submissive in a marriage relationship (Ephesians 5:22) does not mean allowing yourself to be abused by your partner. 1 Peter 3:1

teaches that wives, by being submissive to their husbands, may win them to Christ by their behavior. But it does not teach that wives must allow themselves to be verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually abused.

It is important to realize that confrontation is a biblical principle which Jesus taught about in Matthew 18:15-20. When abuse occurs, the confrontation of the abuser will play a key role in breaking the cycle of abuse and working toward restoration. It is important that the abused person seek help from a pastor or counselor. The goal should be to break through the denial and lovingly restore the abuser with a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1). However, safety for the abused person is primary.

- 8. Repentance and Reconciliation:** We must draw upon God's strength to endure difficult circumstances and overcome (Philippians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10). Don't give up just because it is hard. When problems occur in a marriage, the goal is always reconciliation. True reconciliation requires repentance for failures by both husband and wife (Psalm 51:17; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9).

Forgiveness is often needed during seasons of trouble and a willingness to forgive demonstrates faith in the relationship. You may not feel like forgiving your spouse, and you may not feel they deserve your offer of forgiveness. However, we must remember that we all stand forgiven by God and don't deserve His forgiveness either. On the basis of our confidence in the Lord's forgiveness of us, we are compelled to extend His love and forgiveness to others, especially our spouse (Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:12-14).

Conclusion

When problems or marital issues arise it becomes crucial that the problems are handled using biblical principles. We believe that God has called us to a sacrificial love for one another using the guidance and wisdom He has provided in His Word. There are no perfect marriages, and rarely do they go according to plan. However, we worship a big God who is able to give us the strength and endurance to face any circumstance.

West Side Church Position On Separation In Marriage

Summary

We believe that the believer will be able, with the aid of God's Word and His grace, to work out the problems that may occur in a marriage relationship without marriage separation and/or divorce. We also understand that under some conditions separation may be necessary.

Most Relevant Bible Passages

- I Corinthians 7:10-16
- Ephesians 5:22-33
- Colossians 3:18-19
- Matthew 19:5-8
- Malachi 2:16
- Ecclesiastes 9:9

Position Explained

The position of the Bible concerning separation in marriage is understood by West Side's spiritual leaders to be as follows:

Is Separation Allowed For In Scripture?

I Corinthians 7:10-16, Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-19 are consistent in teaching the following about separation:

1. **Why Is God Displeased Over Separation In A Marriage?** God desires for the marriage relationship to be a healthy union between a man and a woman. When we separate in our marriage we tear apart what God has brought together (Matthew 19:6). Separation, whether it is legal or physical, involves the division of a married couple, and it displeases God. I Corinthians 7:10-11 says, "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife."
2. **What If My Spouse Is Not A Christian And Wants To Separate?** If an unbelieving spouse is willing to live with the believing spouse, then they should stay together, and you as the believer will bring sanctification into your home. But if the unbelieving spouse wants to leave then the believer is to allow them to go. The believer is not "bound" in those situations. The word "bound" comes from a root word that means to be a servant and denotes a permanent relationship. In other words, the believer is freed from the bonds of marriage if the unbeliever wants to leave the relationship.
3. **What If My Spouse Initiates A Separation, But Not A Divorce?** 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 is not referring to a finalized legal divorce, but a "separation" only. The Greek word used for "depart" is *chorizo*, and it means "to place room between, to separate." This is clearly seen because the husband and wife before the separation are still husband and wife after the separation. For both husband and wife the final message here is to be reconciled.
4. **What Is A Situation Where Separation May Be Necessary?** Separation is never an ideal situation, but because of sin, it is sometimes necessary. If a spouse or child is being physically abused, for example, they should immediately seek help outside the home and separate from the abuser until they have gotten help. Prayer and counsel from their pastor are also important for the restoration of the marriage and family.
5. **What Type Of Relationships Can I Have When I Am Separated?** 1 Corinthians 7:10b-11a commands for you to remain unmarried. To remain "unmarried" means you should not have a sexually or emotionally intimate relationship with anyone else. Instead, be "reconciled to your husband [or wife]" (1Corinthians 7:11b). When a separation occurs, we're to be faithful and abstinent. Sexual relations dictate union in God's eyes. When the husband and wife are joined together in sex, "...the two shall become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5).
6. **Why Is The "One Flesh" Issue So Important?** When a couple comes together in the covenant of marriage, the Bible tells us that God joins them together into one flesh. "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matthew 19:6). Marriage is intended to be a lifelong commitment, not a temporary solution for loneliness, emotional or sexual needs. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and never intends for a couple to separate once they are married (Matthew 19:8).

Conclusion

Marriage vows should not be taken lightly, and separation should not be pursued casually. When a mar-

riage is under stress, the priority must be reconciliation above separation. The creator of marriage is a Redeemer and has called us to share in His work of reconciliation. To claim the power of His reconciliation in our hearts while denying it in our marriages is inconsistent with God's very nature (2 Corinthians 5:16-21).

When separation occurs one of the primary goals ought to be seeking the Lord's wisdom in prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5-6) and moving as rapidly as possible to reconciliation. The period of separation ought to be brief and approached as a commitment to follow God's will.

There are some counselors, even those who claim to be Christian, who will not share this cautious view about marital separation. Always check counsel from people against the counsel of God's Word (2 Corinthians 2:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Once separated, it becomes increasingly difficult to reverse the momentum leading away from the commitment to reconcile.

West Side Church Position on Divorce and Remarriage

Summary

We believe in the biblical position allowing divorce to be sought by either partner on the grounds of persistent adultery or fornication by either married partner. When restoration of the marriage has failed, then divorce will be allowed. We have followed the premise that it is God's desire for marriage to endure, and only allow for divorce under the biblically stated conditions. When a man or woman have been divorced under these conditions, remarriage will be allowed.

Most Relevant Bible Passages

- Malachi 2:13-16
- Matthew 19:3-30
- 1 Corinthians 7:10-17

Position Explained

The position of the Bible concerning divorce and remarriage is understood by West Side's spiritual leaders to be as follows:

What Does God Think Of Divorce?

God instituted marriage and desires the best for those He loves. Therefore, God hates divorce. It violates His intention for marriage, based on Genesis 2:24, and causes enormous suffering. He clearly states His opposition in Malachi 2, when the sin of divorce by the leaders and people was destroying the testimony of God's people.

What If My Situation Is Unique?

Every situation is unique and must be examined by pastor/elder leadership to determine the application of these passages to an individual or couple.

Is Divorce The Unpardonable Sin?

God is merciful. When someone comes to Christ, they are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1-7). Those things done in ignorance, prior to salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are not counted against a person in terms of his Christian character. Even the Apostle Paul was guilty of all manner of

sin, including participation in the stoning of Stephen. Concerning these things he says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that He considered me faithful, appointing me to His service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 1:12-14).

Sins committed prior to salvation did not disqualify Paul from leadership. Therefore, those who were married and divorced prior to salvation are not in the same situation as believers who have gone through a divorce. For the believer who is divorced, the Lord is still pleased to bring healing and forgiveness. Divorce is certainly not the unpardonable sin, but the implications of divorce are tragic and other solutions ought to be pursued if at all possible.

When Is Divorce Permissible?

Divorce is permitted (not required) by Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:1-12 and related passages (Matthew 5:31-32; Mark 10:1-12). The language of this exception ("except for marital unfaithfulness") indicates repeated infidelity by an unrepentant partner, not a one-time, confessed and repented incident. If possible, reconciliation of a separated or divorced couple is always the top priority. This pursuit of reconciliation is most consistent with a holy God who has chosen to love sinful man unconditionally and with patience. See for example Hosea's relationship with his wife, to see God's desire for reconciliation in unfaithfulness.

What If My Spouse Is Not A Believer In Christ And Wants A Divorce?

Living with an unbelieving spouse can be very difficult, and the instructions in 1 Peter 3:1-7 are especially helpful. But, Paul makes an additional permission in 1 Corinthians 7:10-17 for divorce and remarriage in the case of an unbelieving spouse who leaves a marriage. Again, if possible, reconciliation of a separated or divorced couple is always the top priority. If an unbelieving spouse divorces you, the Scriptures instruct you to let him or her go (1 Corinthians 7:15). Perhaps in doing so you may be able to show the love of Christ.

What If My Spouse Is A Believer In Christ And Wants A Divorce?

See answer to "When is divorce permissible?"

What If My Spouse Deserts Me?

If your unbelieving spouse leaves you or wants out of the marriage, you are free to let him or her go. 1 Corinthians 7:15 states it this way, "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace." Scripture states in 1 Corinthians 7:16 and 1 Peter 3:1-2, that it is possible that your attitude and faith could become a tool to bring your spouse to personal faith in Christ. So, while a believer is free to let an unbelieving spouse leave the relationship, the goal ultimately is to see that person come to Christ.

If divorce occurs, the teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 does not forbid remarriage. We believe that the abandoned spouse is free to remarry if the one who left has either remarried or is an adulterer. The Scriptures are silent about desertion by a believing spouse. West Side Church is here to work with you and your spouse if a believing spouse was to desert you.

What If My Believing Spouse Is Behaving In A Destructive Way?

The Scriptures have little to say about divorce among believers because it is assumed that the redemptive power and work of the Holy Spirit will bring us to healing and restoration when relationships are troubled. However, when persistent marital unfaithfulness is the pattern, the wounded spouse is permitted to divorce as a last resort. However, the Scriptures are silent about other reasons to justify divorce. Certainly, physical violence requires intervention and perhaps separation to deal with the core problem, but divorce is not a necessary outcome.

When Does The Bible Permit Remarriage?

If the divorce has occurred under the biblical exceptions (i.e. persistent marital unfaithfulness by either married partner or by desertion by an unbelieving spouse – as stated in Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7) and there is no possibility for the restoration of the marriage (i.e. the departed spouse is unwilling to reconcile, another marriage has occurred, or death), then remarriage is permissible because the Bible does not forbid remarriage.

Can A Divorced Person Serve As A Spiritual Leader In The Church?

Divorce prior to salvation will not be considered a disqualification for the offices of deacon or elder given that other qualifications are met and a sufficient period of time has passed for marital faithfulness to be demonstrated. Divorce after salvation will not be considered a disqualification if the divorce follows the biblical exceptions. The elders will decide how to apply this standard toward the church.

Will a Divorced Person be Accepted at West Side?

Many divorced people don't feel welcome in churches. These feelings may be self-induced or the result of attitudes within the church. At West Side, it is our desire to revere the institution of marriage while helping people recover from divorce. Both are important. As a church we seek to teach biblical truths and not allow our culture to dictate what we teach. We will also love those who are being hurt by divorce and can offer solutions to serve as an agent of change in the culture. It is the Church that has real answers to the problems of life.

Approved by the Elder Council 08-25-09