Dear Fellow Believers:

A number of questions have been asked of our leadership team recently about marriage, divorce, and remarriage because of the discipline of one of our members. The following position paper is an explanation of Crossroads Bible Church’s understanding of the Scripture related to these issues.

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PRINCIPLES OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

1. God hates divorce. Divorce in the Scripture is permitted as an accommodation to man’s sin for the protection of the innocent party. Since divorce is only a concession to man’s sin and is not part of God’s original plan for marriage, all believers considering divorce should have the same attitude toward divorce as does God.

Explanation: In Matthew 19:6, 8, Christ tells us that divorce is an accommodation to man’s sin and is in violation of God’s purpose for the intimate unity of the marriage bond (Matthew 19:5).

It was a concession for the “innocent party” due to the insensitivity of one partner to God, which is defined biblically as the “hardness of heart” (Matthew 10:6), hence dissolution meant that the innocent party no longer had to remain in a hopeless and intolerable situation (Deuteronomy 24:1-2, 1 Corinthians 7:11-15). It is to be expected that a believer will have the same attitude toward divorce as does God and will see it as a violation of God’s expressed purpose for remarriage.

2. The only biblical grounds for divorce are (1) fornication (any abnormal sexual activity), (2) adultery (unfaithfulness of a marriage partner), or (3) a non-believing partner who initiates the divorce due to incompatibility with a Christian.

Explanation: The Bible recognizes three basic causes for obtaining a divorce:

a. The first is fornication (porneia). Porneia seems to cover a wide area of sexual activity such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and incest (Matthew 19:9, 5:32, 1 Corinthians 5:1). (cf. Kittle, T.D.N.T., Vol. 6, pp. 582-83, 587, 590)

b. The second biblical ground for obtaining a divorce is adultery (moikeia). This is the violation of the sexual unity of the marriage by having intercourse with a legally married person (Matthew 19:9). Adultery can take place even after the “official” dissolution of the marriage if the divorce is non-biblical grounds (Mark 10:11-12, Matthew 5:32).

c. The third reason for obtaining a divorce is in cases where a non-believing mate refuses to live with his or her believing spouse because of his or her Christian testimony. In such cases the believer is not to initiate the divorce proceeding (1 Corinthians 7:12:16).

3. Remarriage is permitted for the innocent party when the divorce was on biblical grounds. In cases where a divorce was obtained between believers on non-biblical grounds the person who remarries first commits “adultery,” and the person who marries a person who was divorced on non-biblical grounds also commits adultery.

Explanation: According to the Old Testament pattern remarriage was almost always allowed
after the divorce (the exception is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-5). The New Testament allows for remarriage when the divorce was based upon biblical grounds. In cases where the divorce was not for the three reasons in section 2, the believer is exhorted to (1) seek for reconciliation, or else (2) remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

When one party remakes after a divorce which was on non-biblical grounds, that person has committed adultery because God did not recognize the validity of the divorce (Mark 10:11; Matthew 5:33). Since the remarried partner has "committed adultery" the marriage bond is now broken and the remaining partner is free to remarry.

The Bible gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12).

4. Believers who pursue divorce on non-biblical grounds are subject to church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God.

Explanation: A believer who obtains a divorce on non-biblical grounds and remarries is living in a state of "adultery" since God did not recognize the validity of the original divorce (Mark 10:11-12, Matthew 5:32). That person is subject to the steps of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 and as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

5. Salvation means that a person begins a new life. The believer is then responsible to live up to what God has revealed about marriage and divorce from the point of his or her salvation.

Explanation: According to 2 Corinthians 5:17 the believer has become a "new creature" when he or she accepted Christ as personal savior. This does not mean that Christ immediately erases painful memories, bad habits or the underlying causes for past marital problems, but that He begins a process of transformation through the Holy Spirit and the Word. A sign of saving faith will be receptivity and a willingness to obey what Christ has revealed about marriage and divorce through the Word.

The Apostle Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:20, 27 is that a believer is to see what ever circumstance that they were in when they became a believer as from God. If they were called while married they are not to seek a divorce (except on the grounds as given in Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16). If they were called while divorced they are free to be remarried to another believer (2 Corinthians 6:14).

6. In cases where divorce took place on non-biblical grounds or where the guilty party repents, the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. It is assumed that the repentant party will endeavor to restore the marriage whenever possible as a sign of true repentance.

Explanation: In cases where two believers were divorced on non-biblical grounds the grace of God becomes operative at the point of repentance and confession, and they can once again experience the joy of their relationship with Christ and their mate.

A true sign of repentance will be a desire to implement 1 Corinthians 7:11; a willingness to remain unmarried or else to be reconciled to their mate.

In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on non-biblical grounds and remarried, the second marriage union is recognized as living in "adultery" (Mark 10:11-12). If repentance
takes place it is recognized that to obtain a second divorce would only compound the problem (Deuteronomy 24:1-5). Hence, they are to remain in the second marriage.

7. The church has a responsibility to uphold the biblical ideal of marriage especially as exemplified by its leadership. In cases where there has been a divorce in a person’s past, the church has an obligation to restrict for a period of time the person’s involvement in leadership until it can be proven that the present marriage exemplifies Christ’s relationship to His church.

Explanation: 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 sets the marital qualification for leadership within the church. The phrase “the husband of one wife” does not mean that a person can not have had a divorce in his past since none of the qualifications listed refer to specific acts in the past (prior to salvation or subsequent to salvation) but to qualities which characterize a man’s life.

It is especially important in cases where there has been a divorce in a man’s past, that there is a period of careful observation to see that his present marriage is characterized by pure devotion and sacrificial love.