

Bethel Church Letter from The Elders on Marriage

Dear Engaged Couple,

Congratulations! You are entering into a God-designed adventure—man and woman designed for each other, marriage designed to be a source of pleasure, procreation, partnership, and prodding toward growth. As elders at Bethel, we want to promote marriage as God intends it to be. Therefore, we strive to promote weddings in which the couple is following what He has given in the Bible as guidelines for marriage. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the guiding biblical principles we use for wedding ceremonies performed by Bethel's staff or held in its facilities.

The following is an outline of biblical information related to marriage and our expectations regarding weddings, marriage and remarriage:

1. Marriage was instituted and designed by God (**Genesis 2:21-23, Matthew 19:4-6**).
2. Christians should not be bound together with people who do not believe (**II Corinthians 6:14-18**). This means that a believer should not marry a non-believer. This biblical principle also implies that even though both parties say they are Christians, their common faith and vision for the future should be explored as a part of the pre-marital process.
3. Sexual relationships outside of marriage are forbidden in scripture (**I Corinthians 6:15-20**). Couples are expected to abstain from sexual intercourse and any other behaviors that constitute sexual activity until they are married. If the couple is cohabitating or living at the same address, every effort must be made to project a godly testimony (**I Thessalonians 5:21, 22**) by separating residences until they are married.
4. Marriage is a lifetime covenant made before God that should not be broken other than by the death of a spouse (**Matthew 19:5, 6**). If one or both of you have been previously married, the following criteria will be used to determine if you will be remarried at Bethel:
 - a. Your spouse has died.
 - b. You were deserted by an unbelieving spouse (**I Corinthians 7:10-15**).
 - c. A believer has been deserted by their spouse (**Matthew 5:32**).
 - d. Your spouse broke the marriage through sexual activity outside of marriage (**Matthew 5:31-33**).
 - e. Your spouse has been remarried or taken another partner.

If biblical grounds for divorce are lacking, you will be encouraged to seek reconciliation with your previous spouse rather than remarry and thereby enter into an adulterous relationship.

The Bible is clear about the significance of marriage and thus Bethel Church is committed to maintaining the standards detailed above. These instructions are not intended as barriers to happiness. God gave them for our protection against future problems and sin, and to help ensure a solid foundation for each new union. By these guidelines God has provided an avenue for those who are seeking a new marriage to enter into marital commitment with a right relationship before the Lord and each other.

Sincerely,

Bethel Elders

See attachment for referenced Bible verses

Scriptures are taken from the New International Version Bible

1. **Marriage was instituted and designed by God as a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman. (Genesis 2:21-23, Matthew 19:4-6)**

Genesis 2:21-23

²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."

Matthew 19:4-6

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

2. **Christians should not be bound together with people who do not believe (II Corinthians 6:14—18). This means that a believer should not marry a non-believer. This biblical principle also implies that even though both parties say they are Christians, their common faith and vision for the future should be explored as a part of the pre-marital process.**

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

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? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." ¹⁷ Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." ¹⁸ And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

3. **Sexual relationships outside of marriage are forbidden in scripture (I Corinthians 6:15—20). Couples are expected to abstain from sexual intercourse and any other behaviors that constitute sexual activity until they are married. If the couple is cohabitating or living at the same address, every effort must be made to project a godly testimony (I Thessalonians 5: 21, 22) by separating residences until they are married.**

1 Corinthians 6:15-20

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil.

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4. Marriage is a lifetime covenant made before God that should not be broken other than by the death of a spouse (Matthew 19: 5, 6). If one or both of you have been previously married, the following criteria will be used to determine if you will be remarried at Bethel.
- a. Your spouse has died.
 - b. You were deserted by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10—15)
 - c. A believer has been deserted by his or her spouse (Matthew 5:32)
 - d. Your spouse broke the marriage through sexual activity outside of marriage (Matthew 5:31—33; we encourage forgiveness and reconciliation when repentance has occurred.)
 - e. Your spouse has been remarried or taken another partner.

Matthew 19:5-6

⁵and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

1 Corinthians 7:10-15

¹⁰To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. ¹²To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

Matthew 5:32

³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 5:31-33

³¹"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.'