

Reflections on the Legitimate Grounds for Divorce and Remarriage among Chinese Christians

(An abstract)

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Divorce and remarriage are difficult and controversial problems that confront house churches in China today. Churches are supposed to console, encourage, instruct and build up believers with the timeless teachings of Scripture.

According to the Matthean Exception, a believer is entitled to divorce and remarriage on condition that the spouse has committed adultery. In terms of the Pauline Privilege, a believer deserted by the unbelieving spouse may also divorce and remarry. Besides, the death of the spouse allows the believer to remarry. In the New Testament period, in contrast to the Old Testament period, marital neglect, indecent behaviors and mixed marriage do not serve as legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage.

When dealing with the problem of divorce and remarriage, we should bear in mind God's original design for marriage as an eternal union between one man and one woman. We should avoid the danger of focusing on the trees and missing the wood. We need to emphasize that the New Testament teachings only permit but never require divorce and remarriage. Whenever it is feasible, preservation of marriage and marital reconciliation should always be the

goal of the pastoral care. Church discipline and pastoral care need to be connected with the biblical balance between justice and love. The church should encourage those struggling and suffering in their marriage to study Scripture diligently, to reflect reverently on their relationship with God, to pursue holiness and to practice godliness in their journey of rediscovering the essence of marriage.