

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Statement

FROM THE WATERMARK ELDERS

As shepherds of God's people, we are obligated to bring clarity to the difficult issue of divorce and remarriage. After much study and prayerful consideration, we believe the position below honors our Lord, is in alignment with His Word, and serves His people. We humbly ask that grace and understanding be extended toward our position, even as we offer grace to our brothers and sisters who find either a broader or lesser freedom before the Lord. We pray that the love, care, sensitivity, and humility we have sought in writing this document would be evident to all who read it and are affected by our leadership. It seems appropriate to begin this statement by expressing our gratitude that the cross of Christ is sufficient to cover all of our sin, and we pray with you that His Spirit continually guides us into all truth.

MARRIAGE

God is profoundly serious about the sacredness of marriage, and as His followers and servants, it is our privilege to share this high view. In recent years, there has been a steady assault on the biblical definition of marriage and an increased ease in the process of filing for divorce. It is more important than ever to reiterate the wisdom and goodness of God's plan for marriage.

The Bible clearly teaches that the Lord, in His creation of Adam and Eve as husband and wife, designed marriage to be lifelong, covenantal, monogamous, and between male and female. In addition, Scripture explicitly commands that a believer is not to be "joined together" with an unbeliever.

CONCLUSION: Marriage was uniquely created by God for the display of His glory and is a portrait of God's relationship to His people and Jesus' love for the Church (and therefore how the Church is to be devoted to Christ).

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE STUDY: Genesis 2:18-24; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 19:3-6; Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:22-33.

DIVORCE

Few life experiences are more painful personally or destructive societally than divorce, so it is unsurprising to find that

God hates it. God hates divorce because He loves people, including those who have been through the divorce process.

Just as the pain of divorce permeates our culture, it likewise permeates the Church; and so with sensitive hearts, believers must weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn as a result of divorce. Divorce was never intended to be part of God's design and is always costly to the divorcing parties, connected children, and society. While God hates divorce, He does not hate divorcees. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin, but it is a result of sin and hardness of heart. Divorce is never God's best, and anyone who loves God and knows of His goodness would never consider it without broad input from community and spiritual counsel. Even when divorce is necessary to protect individuals from danger/abuse, it is to be done as an expression of love and in hope of producing repentance in the guilty party that leads to healing and reconciliation. Even in these extreme cases, divorce is never to be considered as the end to a relationship, but only a severe mercy that will ultimately lead to less sin and eventual restoration of the relationship.

Whenever discussing possible situations that might allow for divorce, it is imperative that serious believers continually reiterate their desire and deep

conviction that the hopeful resolution to all marital strife is reconciliation (restoring a marriage, of course, depends on two tender hearts). In other words, just as it is not wise to rush into marriage, it is never prudent to rush out of marriage either. Forgiveness and reconciliation are clearly near to the heart of Jesus' life and message.

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The Bible says the following about the difficult topic of divorce and remarriage.

SEXUAL IMMORALITY

The "exception clause" for divorce (Matthew 19:3-9), which mentions sexual immorality (porneia), is not a permission slip or loophole that would allow or in any way recommend divorce as an appropriate action for an offended Christ-follower. Just as God's gracious covenant of love ultimately overcomes Israel's infidelity (Jeremiah 3), the covenant love modeled by God's people can, and should, overcome the immense pain and hurt of infidelity. As a result, when a spouse has been unfaithful, believers must be committed to counsel the faithful spouse to uphold the sacredness of the marriage covenant and to pursue and exhaust every means necessary to **grant forgiveness and reconciliation** (rather than expeditiously pointing him or her to the "exception clause"). The expectation of Scripture is that followers of Jesus **first** and **always** be committed to **genuine repentance and restoration** of the marriage by calling the unfaithful spouse to be reconciled to God.

CONCLUSION: There is a broad call on the believer's life to a ministry of reconciliation, and this certainly includes the Christian marriage. Even in cases of adultery in the

marriage, divorce is **never** the first option and rarely the final option. Believers must be fully committed to wisely and cautiously counseling toward repentance and restoration of the relationship. Though the humble work of forgiving, peacemaking, and reconciliation may not be easy, the effort required is worth the opportunity to see God glorified and His children walking in the light.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE TO STUDY: Genesis 2:18-24; Malachi 2:14-16; the book of Hosea; Jeremiah 3, Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Colossians 1:19-22.

ABANDONMENT

A tenderhearted marriage consisting of two Christ-followers is always God's "ideal." Hard hearts cannot support a marriage, and a hard heart is often found in the midst of a "mixed" marriage (i.e., one composed of a believing and an unbelieving spouse). Scripture counsels the believing spouse in a "mixed" marriage not to seek a divorce from the unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10-16), but it permits divorce when an **unbelieving** spouse insists on divorcing a **believing** spouse.

CONCLUSION: Though the "mixed" marriage may end in divorce, the believing spouse is not given permission to **initiate** divorce. Rather (as mentioned in the **sexual immorality conclusion** above), the faithful, believing spouse should grant forgiveness, work through difficult circumstances, and push for reconciliation.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE STUDY: 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 14-16; 1 Peter 3:1-2.

ABUSE

It is never our counsel to recommend that a spouse remain physically present in a physically abusive situation. Additionally, in a home where there is physical abuse and physical danger to children, prudence demands action (Proverbs 22:3, 10). Where obvious danger exists for either a spouse or child, all appropriate means must be exhausted to bring the abuse to an immediate halt, including: separation, church discipline, police action, a court order, and other kinds of intervention by church members, family, and friends. When all means of biblical intervention have been deployed and yet denied by the unrepentant spouse, he or she will then be treated as an unbeliever. Should the unrepentant spouse (unbeliever) "force the issue" by insisting on divorce, Scripture calls

the offended spouse to allow for divorce that is clearly initiated by the unrepentant spouse (unbeliever).

CONCLUSION: While extreme cases of abuse may escalate to a level where an unrepentant spouse (unbeliever) abandons the offended spouse (believer), it is unwise to state that physical abuse, *without* appropriate biblical intervention, *justifies* divorce. Even in cases where divorce (legal action) is the only loving recourse to protect the sinning party from continuing in his/her sin, any action taken by the believing spouse is to be done with a heart toward eventual healing and reconciliation as God allows.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE STUDY: Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 13:1-5; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Peter 3:1-2.

REMARRIAGE

While there is a broad range of convictions on the issue of divorce among serious students of Scripture, there is an even greater variety of positions when it comes to remarriage. After carefully reading through the sexual immorality, abandonment, and abuse sections above, an obvious “guiding principle” for all followers of Jesus is the call to a “ministry of reconciliation.” Before any believer asks when/if remarriage after divorce is permissible, they must first ask if reconciliation is a viable option. Even in the most heartbreaking cases of sexual immorality, the most perplexing cases of abandonment, and the most gut-wrenching cases of abuse, the power of the Spirit to transform and the love of Christ in abiding believers means reconciliation is a viable option as long as the former spouse has not remarried or is not deceased. While in a season when the possibility of reconciliation exists, it best models the covenant love of Christ for His Church that one should remain single or be reconciled in marriage to their ex-spouse.

CONCLUSION: Freedom to remarry is not solely to be determined by the guilt or innocence of either spouse, whether either spouse has been or is a believer, or whether divorce happened before or after either spouse’s conversion. *In order to model the never-ending covenant love of God, the decision to remarry is to be considered only when the former spouse is deceased or has entered into a marital covenant with another person as defined by God in Genesis.*

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE STUDY: Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 15, 39.

Given the biblical truth outlined above, it is not honoring to God for any ordained or commissioned leader of Watermark Community Church to officiate the remarriage of an individual whose spouse is still living and remains unmarried. Likewise, the church’s facilities will not be used for a marriage in these circumstances.

Watermark Members are encouraged to live a life of devotion to Christ and remain single, practicing chastity as they prayerfully wait for the Lord to win their separated/divorced spouse to Himself and begin the process of restored trust and reconciliation. Given the difficulty of absolute dogma on this issue, grace and respect will be extended to the individual believer’s right to understand God’s revealed Word to provide broader freedom. In these cases, for the sake of the ministry (2 Corinthians 6:3), individuals with marriages in the circumstances outlined above may not be asked to serve in ministries related to marriage, but will not consider them deserving of church discipline when great reverence for God’s Word, caution, and humility before the community of God’s people are modeled.