



## Shepherd Statement on Divorce May 2nd, 2023

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This statement is intended to help our church understand how we intend to teach, counsel and shepherd the flock at Stafford Baptist Church in regards to divorce. We understand the sensitivity of divorce, it is one of the most difficult things we can experience in this life. This statement below is not all that there is to be said—if you would like to read more or talk to the pastors, please email us at [elders@staffordbaptistchurch.org](mailto:elders@staffordbaptistchurch.org).

Below you'll read a summary of our understanding of divorce and remarriage, which will then be followed by a brief explanation of key parts of that statement.

*We believe God has given marriage as a good, life-long gift. God designed marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman for life to reflect the beauty of the gospel and Jesus' love for his bride, the Church. Because of our hardness of heart, God has made divorce permissible when the marriage covenant is broken. The breaking of the marriage covenant does not necessitate the nullifying of the marriage covenant through divorce. Remarriage is only permissible when a preceding divorce was biblically permissible. Even when divorce has taken place, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation should always be pursued, though forgiveness and reconciliation may not mean a restoring of the marriage. We also understand from scripture that divorce does not automatically disqualify a brother from pursuing eldership.<sup>1</sup>*

**Key Passages for study: Genesis 2:18-25, Genesis 3:1-20; Exodus 21:10-11; Deuteronomy 24:1-5; Matthew 5:31-32, 19:1-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40; Ephesians 5:22-32; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6**

**Marriage is a good, life-long gift in God's design** (Genesis 2:18-25, Matthew 19:4-6, Mark 10:6-12)

Jesus and the whole Bible hold a very high and positive vision for the covenant of marriage. Marriage did not originate from the minds of man, but from the mind of our God. God intended for marriage to be a life-long covenant commitment between one man and one woman.

Marriage exists in part to picture the gospel of Jesus. As a man selflessly loves and cares for his bride and as the bride joyfully respects and submits to her husband, we see a beautiful picture of Christ's love for the church and the church's submission to Jesus (Eph. 5:22-33). Any right understanding of divorce must be filtered through this positive understanding of marriage.

For a summary of our understanding of the positive vision for marriage, please read the Stafford Baptist Confession of Faith, Article 20 entitled "Marriage and Family" on our [website](#).

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<sup>1</sup>This understanding and definition has been significantly informed from reading and discussing this Andy Naselli article: [https://andynaselli.com/wp-content/uploads/2019\\_Divorce\\_and\\_Remarriage.pdf](https://andynaselli.com/wp-content/uploads/2019_Divorce_and_Remarriage.pdf). We'd highly recommend reading it!

**Divorce is permissible when the marriage covenant is broken** (*Exodus 21:10-11; Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 5:32, 19:8-9; 1 Corinthians 7:15-16*)

While God's design was for marriage to be life-long, we are sinners who are hard-hearted. Due to our hard-heartedness, Jesus says, divorce was allowed in certain cases. The apostle Paul taught this as well in 1 Corinthians 7.

We must be clear though, the intention of Jesus and the apostles was to be counter cultural with how high of a standard they held for divorce. The culture that Jesus and the apostles were speaking into was a culture of any-cause divorce, similar to what we see in our culture today. Rather than affirming any-cause divorce, Jesus and his disciples taught and held a high view of marriage and high standards for divorce.

In our summary of their teaching, divorce is permissible when the marriage covenant is broken. This includes, but is not limited to: adultery (Matt. 5:31-32, 19:1-10), abandonment (1 Cor. 7:15-16) and abuse. In each of these scenarios the marriage covenant is being broken. The breaking of the marriage covenant does not necessitate the nullifying of the covenant through divorce, but does make it permissible.

**Remarriage is only permissible when a preceding divorce was biblically permissible** (*Matthew 19:1-10, 1 Corinthians 7:15-16*)

It would have been understood by those whom Jesus taught that when he gave the exception for divorce that implied the right to remarry. We think Andy Naselli says it well when he writes, “*Both Shammai and Hillel (the two views of divorce) permitted remarriage, as did all known Jewish and Greco-Roman views at that time. If Jesus intended to forbid remarriage, then it is highly likely he would have forbidden it explicitly without any exceptions because everyone-Jew and Gentile-assumed that remarriage is legitimate when the divorce is legitimate. Divorce in the Jewish and Greco-Roman historical-cultural contexts always included the right to remarry.*”<sup>2</sup>

**Repentance, Forgiveness and Reconciliation should always be pursued** (*Matthew 18:21-35*)

If a Christian sins or is sinned against they are to pursue repentance and/or be ready to forgive. This doesn't mean that the marriage will always be restored, because we understand that there are consequences for our sin. But it does mean that the heart attitude must be one of pursuing and being ready to forgive when there is true, biblical and godly repentance.

**Divorce does not automatically disqualify a brother from pursuing eldership** (*1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6*)

The qualification for pastors in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 to be a “husband of one-wife” should be understood as a “one-man woman” in the present tense. In other words, they are to be known by the church and community to have a track-record of love and faithfulness to their current spouse that reflects the love and faithfulness of Jesus for his bride. In light of this, a divorce from a previous marriage will not automatically disqualify a brother, though every case will be handled on a case by case basis.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 12.