

Divorce and Remarriage

**A Position Paper by Pastor Juan Sanchez on behalf of the Elders of High Pointe Baptist Church
Originally Published April 25, 2008; Updated March 11, 2011; November 27, 2011**

Preface

We, the elders of High Pointe Baptist Church, acknowledge the reality that marriage is under attack in our culture. For this reason we seek to promote a high view of marriage as presented in the Scriptures through regular biblical teaching/preaching and personal example. Marriage is an institution created by God (Genesis 1:27; 2:18-25; Matthew 19:4). A simple reading of Scripture indicates that God meant for marriage to be between one man and one woman for a lifetime (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6).

Nevertheless, because of the hardness of our hearts, divorce exists (Matthew 19:8). Throughout the history of the church, the issue of divorce and remarriage has been addressed in various ways. As elders, we understand that each of us may be influenced in our conclusions by tradition, culture, personal experience, etc. This statement is an attempt to guide High Pointe Baptist Church through the muddy waters of the debate related to divorce and remarriage. In this statement we want first to acknowledge that divorce is an evil that exists today because of willful rebellion against God's design (Matthew 19:7-8). Yet, in order to protect those who are sinned against through such willful rebellion against God's design for marriage, the Bible teaches that there are two exceptions under which divorce and remarriage are permitted: sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9) and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

The elders understand that beloved brothers and sisters may disagree with the position taken here (see chart on various views on divorce and remarriage on page 4 of this document). In particular, we are aware that there are those who see no exceptions for divorce and, therefore, no permissible grounds for remarriage. Further, others may agree with the grounds for divorce presented in this statement, while seeing no permissible ground for remarriage. This statement in no way condemns those brothers and sisters in Christ; they are free to walk according to their personal convictions. The purpose of this statement is to guide the elders in addressing the issues related to divorce and remarriage and to inform the members of High Pointe how the elders will proceed in counseling our congregation in these matters. May the Lord grant us all wisdom and have mercy on us as we deal with such matters.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Juan Sanchez
Acts 20:24

On the Sanctity of Marriage

It is important to note that whenever Jesus was asked the question regarding divorce (Matthew 5:32; 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18), he upheld the sanctity of marriage. Therefore, before considering the topic of divorce and remarriage, it is imperative that we follow our Lord's teaching and uphold the sanctity of marriage as well.

1. Marriage is sacred because God created us male and female with the intention that we would be united in marriage (Matthew 19:4-5; see also Genesis 1:27; 2:24). This was God's original intention.
2. In the marriage union, the man and the woman become one flesh (Matthew 19:6; see Genesis 2:24).
3. Since this one flesh union is what God originally intended and ordains, this union is not to be severed by man (Matthew 19:6).
4. It is clear from God's original intention as revealed in Scripture that the only factor intended by God that would sever this one flesh union is the death of a spouse (Romans 7:1-3; see also Matthew 19:1-3-6; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18).
5. Based upon God's original intention for marriage and based upon the fact that human marriage is intended to reflect the covenantal relationship between God and His people, it is clear that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), and so should we.

The implications for the sanctity of marriage are that the leadership of High Pointe Baptist Church will teach according to God's original intention for marriage as outlined in Scripture and hold marriage as sacred by teaching and upholding this truth. By God's grace and the Spirit's power, we will seek to uphold the sanctity of marriage in our preaching ministry, counseling ministry, premarital ministry and personal lives and conduct.

On Divorce & Remarriage

Though Jesus upheld the sanctity of marriage as God's original intention when asked about divorce, he does grant permission to divorce on the grounds of sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9). Further, the apostle Paul teaches that divorce is biblically permissible on the grounds that an unbeliever abandons a believing spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). Nevertheless, while divorce and remarriage are permissible on the biblical grounds of sexual immorality and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse, because of God's original intention for marriage and because of the message of the gospel of reconciliation, we will counsel all parties to exert all efforts and exhaust all avenues for repentance and reconciliation. Further, we will never counsel a believer to initiate a divorce.

1. Since God hates divorce and did not originally intend divorce, He in no way requires it, legitimates it, sanctions it, nor encourages it, even on biblical grounds. Divorce, regardless of the grounds, is contrary to God's original intention.
2. Divorce is only permitted in Scripture because of human sinfulness: i.e., because of the hardness of our hearts (Matthew 19:8). It is important to remember that divorce is never required or encouraged on any grounds in the Scriptures; it is, rather, discouraged.
3. Divorce is only permitted in Scripture on the grounds of (1) sexual immorality (Matthew 19:3-9), and (2) an unbelieving spouse who seeks a divorce from a believing spouse because he/she no longer wants to be involved in a spiritually-mixed marriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

Though the term "sexual immorality" (*porneia*) is broad, it refers to sexual sins that are committed against someone such as: adultery, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, etc. In such cases where a spouse has been sinned against, he or she is not obligated to seek divorce but is only permitted to divorce.

In the case of an unbelieving spouse who divorces a believing spouse, though the believing spouse is biblically free to remarry, the elders will encourage the believing spouse to remain unmarried and exhaust all efforts for reconciliation with the unbelieving spouse.

4. A divorce that takes place on grounds other than sexual immorality or the abandonment by an unbelieving spouse: i.e., non-biblical grounds, leads to adultery (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11; Romans 7:2-3).

A man who divorces his wife on non-biblical grounds places her in the position to commit adultery if she remarries and himself commits adultery if he remarries.

A woman who divorces her husband on unbiblical grounds places her husband in the position to commit adultery if he remarries and herself commits adultery if she remarries.

Since divorce on non-biblical grounds is open rebellion against God's design for marriage and His written Word, those who profess faith in Christ and pursue such a divorce on non-biblical grounds are subject to the biblical process of church discipline as outlined in Scripture (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

5. Remarriage is only permitted in Scripture on the two biblical grounds stated above: sexual immorality and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse.

When a divorce results from sexual immorality, it is understood that such immorality severs the marital bond and frees the victimized spouse to remarry. However, the victimized spouse should seek repentance from the guilty spouse in hope of reconciliation.

When a divorce results from the departure of an unbelieving spouse, the apostle Paul's basic principle is to remain as you are: unmarried—his preference (1 Corinthians 7:6-8). However, if the unbelieving spouse seeks a divorce, then the believing spouse is no longer bound and is free to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:15) if he/she does not have the gift of celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:2, 9). Nevertheless, the believing spouse will be counseled to remain unmarried while exhausting all avenues for the sake of reconciliation.

If someone who has never been married marries a divorced person who has been divorced on non-biblical grounds, then that person commits adultery. However, one is free to marry a divorced person who has been divorced on biblical grounds (Mark 10:12).

Regardless of the grounds for divorce, it is prudent for both parties involved in a divorce to remain unmarried or seek repentance and reconciliation (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

6. In the case where someone has been divorced and remarried on non-biblical grounds, it is important to know that adultery is not an unforgivable sin. The persons in such a marriage should confess their sin of adultery if they have not done so already and embrace the forgiveness that comes by faith in Christ's once for all sacrifice for all who repent and believe (1 John 1:9).

Once any sin has been confessed (including adultery), we must embrace God's forgiveness by faith and understand that we are forgiven. Though Satan will continually tempt us to guilt and despair, we must continually apply the gospel to our selves and remember that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

The resolution for a person who has remarried and becomes aware of their sin is never to divorce their present spouse in order to reunite with their former spouse (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

7. In the case of someone who comes to faith in Christ, the Bible calls us to remain and serve Christ in the condition under which we were called (1 Corinthians 7:20, 24). Regardless of our past life and sins, we are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). As Christians we bring our sins, past and present, to the cross of Christ, embrace the forgiveness granted to us by God's grace, and live in accordance to God's will from that point on.

8. Regarding church practices, we will seek to uphold the sanctity of marriage in our teaching, counseling and conduct.

This means that we will seek to prepare our children to understand God's original intention for marriage by teaching them God's Word in our homes and in the church. We will also seek to exemplify the sanctity of marriage by our own lives.

This means that we will take premarital counseling seriously and help those preparing for marriage understand God's original design. Also, it means that we will not marry those who are not prepared for such responsibility.

This means that we will not permit the remarriage of persons who have divorced on unbiblical grounds.

This means that we will regularly preach on the sanctity of marriage from our pulpit.

9. Regarding church leadership, we will follow the same principles outlined in Scripture. It is important to note that in the case of elders and deacons, the phrase, "husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6) refers not to divorce/remarriage but to marital fidelity. The biblical qualifications for church leadership are meant to investigate a person's on-going character in the areas of personal conduct, family life, doctrine and public reputation.

This means that a person who is presently living in adultery as defined by Scripture will be restricted from serving in leadership.

This means that a leader whose marriage is in distress, will be asked to seek counsel and step aside from their duties until matters are resolved.

Views on Divorce and Remarriage

	Divorce			Remarriage		
	Adultery	Desertion	Other	Adultery	Desertion	Other
1.	No	No	No	No	No	No
2.	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
3.	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
4.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
5.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
6.	Yes	Yes	Yes (Limited)	Yes	Yes	Yes (Limited)
7.	Yes	Yes	Yes (Unlimited)	Yes	Yes	Yes (Unlimited)

1. No Divorce; no remarriage
2. Divorce for desertion only; no remarriage
3. Divorce for desertion only; remarriage for desertion only
4. Divorce for adultery and desertion; no remarriage
5. Divorce for adultery and desertion; remarriage for adultery and desertion
6. Divorce for adultery, desertion, and physical abuse; remarriage for adultery, desertion, and physical abuse
7. Divorce for anything; remarriage for anything