

## FBC STATEMENT ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

**This is not a dogmatic statement of the church, but a position paper of our current elder body, which has not been codified into the bylaws or constitution of our church. This means that at any time the congregation feels appropriate, it may be codified into dogma at request of the congregation using standard protocol in the creation of bylaws.**

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Therefore, we hate divorce. While a writ of divorce (an official decree) was given by Moses in Israel's Civil Code (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), Jesus said it was "for the hardness of hearts" (Matthew 19:8). There should be no hard hearts in the New Covenant (Ezekiel 36:26).

To be clear, FBC Sidney has never counseled, nor will it ever, divorce *regardless of the circumstances*. In cases of abuse, adultery, and neglect, we have only counseled physical separation for the safety of the wounded or abused party. Doing so gives God time to act in the hearts of men, which he is capable of doing. In short, FBC Sidney does not, under any condition, sanction divorce.

Those who chose separation (as opposed to divorce) should be content in their singleness and pray their spouse returns (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). If an unbelieving spouse leaves and abandons their spouse, the spouse should remain at home, carry on with their lives, and wait for the Lord to do his work (1 Corinthians 7:15).

On remarriage, we do not sanction that which the Bible does not permit. The Scriptures forbids remarriage of the divorced in Luke 16:18. Jesus says the same, but adds an exception to those who have divorced for the cause of adultery, in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:19. At face value, these verses seem to contradict; the first forbids all remarriage, and the second provides an exception.

Thankfully, Scripture must interpret Scripture.

If a spouse dies, they may be remarried (Romans 7:2-3). But as long as he is living and unmarried (Deuteronomy 24:1-22) she must wait for his return.

However, in the New Covenant, there may be instances of extenuating circumstances that arise in which a spouse may be *considered dead*, for the purposes of remarriage. These include the spouse being remarried (see above), or a decree of the church on the grounds of church discipline. In cases of extreme sin (such as sexual abuse, for example, or physical violence), one may be set out of the church as an unbeliever to be "handed over to the devil that their body may be destroyed" (1 Corinthians 5:5). This is a spiritualizing of death, so to speak. Church discipline, as so many theologians have pointed out, is the New Covenant version of the death penalty (because it is done by vote, it is akin to stoning), enacted by the ecclesia.

In such a circumstance, before the individual is allowed to be remarried, FBC determine the following:

If there is any chance of reconciliation between the originally married parties.

If previous spouses have been remarried

How long the individual waited in singleness for their spouse to return

In our experience, somewhere between 80-90% of requests for remarriage are denied, and 20-10% are approved. In this case, it is because we believe that in a spiritual sense, their former spouse is to be considered dead, gone, and removed from the individual's life by either total abandonment, remarriage,

or sinful incorrigibility. **In other words, if there is any reasonable hope for reconciliation – even that of a miraculous hope - remarriage is denied and restoration of the marriage remains the goal.**

For those who come to FBC already remarried, we rest solidly upon “let marriage be held in honor of all” (Hebrews 13:4) and consider past sins forgiven and forgotten, except in the case of one fleeing discipline of another church body.

As it pertains to leadership, we prohibit the ordination of divorced clergy. We do so only partially under the language of 1 Timothy 3:2, “The bishop therefore must be without reproach, **the husband of one wife**, temperate, soberminded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach;”

Many churches interpret the phrase, μᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, to mean “a one woman man,” permitting divorced clergy so long as they are not practicing or have practiced infidelity. Many quality churches and theologians have adopted this view, as well as there existing many good pastors with fruitful pastorates who have been divorced and remarried (this does not excuse it if it were wrong, but it does require respect on our part, to whom it is due). Of them, we make no condemnation on their differing on this verse. Commentaries abound with this interpretative view, and did so long before no-contest divorce became normalized in America. Most often, for these churches, it depends *when* the divorce occurred, before salvation or before ordination being the most common caveats.

This was the view of FBC Sidney until 2012; a divorced man was eligible for ordination as a pastor so long as (A) his wife initiated the divorce or (B) it happened prior to salvation or (C) prior to ordination. No by-law or constitutional change has been made on this issue, nor speaks to it. However, due to circumstances from problems arising from having such men serve as elders, we (the elders) now feel oriented toward the view that such men will not be ordained for pastoral service in our church. We will castigate no sister church or church of like-faith for disagreeing with us on this issue. We will not bar a visiting pastor from preaching, for example, who has been ordained by church of like-faith, despite the fact he is divorced (and of course, is not a philander and remains a “one woman man” in keeping with their own interpretation of the passage, and has not been divorced *while in the pastorate*). *It simply means that we will not ordain him.*

The language – in the Greek – is sufficiently unclear as to keep this from being a hill upon which to die and we refuse to separate from divorced clergy or churches with divorced clergy on this issue, believing in good faith they genuinely disagree on this interpretation and also realizing that part of our own prohibition is not interpretative (we admit the text is complicated in the original tongue) but from previous in-church experience.

Our current view is in part wrought by several divorced clergy who did not go on to live exemplary lives and brought reproach to the congregation, or of whom it could not be said “had their household in order” as children grow older, resentful, disobedient, and disqualified their fathers on multiple grounds.

Without a doubt, a similar standard exists for deacons in verse 12 of the same passage. However, because deacons are servants – and not leaders – combined with the fact they are not ordained for ministerial service as leaders under our polity – we may (upon our discretion given the full evaluation of the history and facts regarding their divorce and/or remarriage) allow such men to serve in the diaconate, being a lesser office of service than that of ordained elders. Likewise, we would ask for the same grace extended to us, given the uncertainty of the passage and original tongue. We would ask of

sister churches to please accept the credentialing (or commissioning) of our deacons based upon our best judgment in sending them out about their business.

Because no constitutional caveat or bylaw on the subject has been made, this is a position paper of the elders of FBC Sidney which means it may – at any time – be brought to the attention of the church body at a regularly scheduled business meeting, to be shored up, changed, or cemented upon vote of the congregation with their own Scriptural interpretation in view and each considered. Until that time, this position paper is to be considered the position of FBC Sidney.