

# POSITIONAL STATEMENTS & POLICIES

## Membership

### Introduction

This is a positional statement on Auburn Grace Community Church's beliefs concerning church membership.

### What We Believe About Church Membership

When an individual is saved, he becomes a member of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Because he is united to Christ and the other members of the church body in this way, he is therefore qualified to become a member of a local expression of that body.

To become a member of a church is to formally commit oneself to an identifiable, local body which has joined together for specific divinely ordained purposes. These purposes include receiving instruction from God's Word (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2), serving and edifying one another through the proper use of spiritual gifts (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11), participation in the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42), and proclaiming the gospel to those who are lost (Matthew 28:18-20). In addition, when one becomes a member of a church, he submits himself to the care and authority of the biblically qualified elders that God has placed in that assembly.

Although Scripture does not contain an explicit command to formally join a local church, the biblical foundation for church membership permeates the New Testament. This biblical basis can be seen most clearly in the example of the early church, the existence of church government, the exercise of church discipline, and the exhortation to mutual edification. The epistles of the New Testament were written to churches or to the leaders of churches such as Philemon, Timothy and Titus. There is also evidence in the New Testament that just as there was a list of widows eligible for financial support (1 Timothy 5:9), there may also have been a list of members that grew as people were saved (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). When a believer moved to another city, his church often wrote a letter of commendation to his new church (Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1; Colossians 4:10; 2 Corinthians 3:1-2).

The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament is that a plurality of elders is to oversee each local body of believers. The specific duties given to these elders presuppose a clearly defined group of church members who are under their care. Among other things, they are to shepherd God's people (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), to labor diligently over them (1 Thessalonians 5:12), to have charge over them (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17), and to keep watch over their souls (Hebrews 13:17). Scripture teaches that the elders will give an account to God for the individuals allotted to their charge (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:3).

Those responsibilities require that there be a distinguishable, mutually understood membership in the local church. Elders can shepherd the people and give an account to God for their spiritual well-being only if they know who they are; they can provide oversight only if they know those for whom they are responsible; and they can fulfill their duty to shepherd the flock only if they know who is part of the flock and who is not. Conversely, Scripture teaches that believers are to submit to their elders. Hebrews 13:17 says "Obey your leaders and submit to them." The one who is not a part of a local church and entrusted themselves to the care and the authority of the elders has no leaders. For that person Hebrews 13:17 is not possible. This verse implies that every believer knows to whom he must submit, which in

turn, assumes clearly defined leadership. This pattern is also evident in the matter of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17, at the end of the four step process to attempt to restore a sinning member, if they refuse to repent, the final step is to put the person out of the assembly (verse 17). This also means someone who is living in a lifestyle contrary to scripture and deserving of church discipline, would not be able to join Auburn Grace Community Church without first repenting and changing their lifestyle.

The New Testament teaches that the church is the body of Christ, and that God has called every member to a life devoted to the growth of the body. In other words scripture exhorts all believers to edify the other members by practicing the “one another’s” of the New Testament ( Hebrews 10:24-25 ) and exercising their spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Mutual edification can only take place in the context of the cooperate body of Christ. Exhortations to this kind of ministry presuppose that believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly. Church membership is simply the formal way to make that commitment.

## **Our Faith-Based Position on Church Membership**

Membership in this church consists of such persons who have confessed Jesus Christ to be their personal Lord and Savior and have been baptized as believers in water by immersion per Matthew 28:20 in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and are willing to submit to the authority of the church in matters of spiritual life and discipline; and having requested membership, have also submitted a written application and have been approved by the board of Overseers or a committee appointed by the Board of Overseers.

Living out a commitment to a local church involves many responsibilities: exemplifying a godly lifestyle in the community, exercising one’s spiritual gifts in diligent service, contributing financially to the work of the ministry, giving and receiving admonishment with meekness and love, and faithfully participating in corporate worship. Much is expected, but much is at stake. For only when every believer is faithful to this kind of commitment is the church able to live up to her calling as Christ’s representative here on earth. We encourage all to attend a local church and make a formal commitment by becoming a member thus fulfilling the patterns shown in scripture.

# **Divorce and Remarriage**

## **Introduction**

This is a positional statement on Auburn Grace Community Church's beliefs concerning divorce and remarriage upon the necessary application of our faith to life and practice.

## **What We Believe About Divorce and Remarriage**

God hates divorce because it always involves unfaithfulness to the solemn covenant of marriage that two partners have entered into before Him, and because it brings harmful consequences to those partners and their children (Mal. 2:14-16). Divorce in scripture is permitted only because of man's sin. Since divorce is only a concession to man's sin and is not part of God's original plan for marriage, all believers should hate divorce as God does and pursue it only when there is no other recourse.

With God's help, a marriage can survive the worst sins. In Matthew 19:3-9, Christ teaches clearly that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin that violates God's original purpose for the intimate unity and permanence of the marriage bond (Gen. 2:24). He taught that God's law allowed divorce only because of "hardness of heart" (Matt. 19:8). Legal divorce was a concession for the faithful partner due to the sexual sin or abandonment by the sinning partner, so that the faithful partner was no longer bound to the marriage (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:12-15). Although Jesus did say that divorce is permitted in some situations, we must remember that His primary point in this discourse is to correct the Jews' idea that they could divorce one another "for any cause at all" (Matt. 19:3), and to show them the gravity of pursuing a sinful divorce. Therefore, the believer should never consider divorce except in specific circumstances and even in those circumstances it should only be pursued reluctantly because there is no other recourse.

The only New Testament grounds for divorce are sexual sin or desertion by an unbeliever. The first is found in Jesus' use of the Greek word 'porneia' (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). This is a general term that encompasses sexual sin such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest. When one partner violates the unity and intimacy of a marriage by sexual sin—and forsakes his or her covenant obligation—the faithful partner is placed in an extremely difficult situation. After all means are exhausted to bring the sinning partner to repentance, the Bible permits release for the faithful partner through divorce (Matt. 5:32; 1 Cor. 7:15). The second reason for permitting a divorce is in cases where an unbelieving mate does not desire to live with his or her believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Because "God has called us to peace" (v. 15), divorce is allowed and may be preferable in such situations. When an unbeliever desires to leave, trying to keep him or her in the marriage may only create greater tension and conflict. Also, if the unbeliever leaves the marital relationship permanently but is not willing to file for divorce, perhaps because of lifestyle, irresponsibility, or to avoid monetary obligations, then the believer is in an impossible situation of having legal and moral obligations that he or she cannot fulfill. Because "the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases" (1 Cor. 7:15) and is therefore no longer obligated to remain married, the believer may file for divorce without fearing the displeasure of God.

## **Our Faith-Based Position on Divorce and Remarriage**

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner only when the divorce was on biblical grounds. In fact, the purpose for a biblical divorce is to make clear that the faithful partner is free to remarry, but only in the Lord (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).

Those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God and their partners, and for them to marry another is an act of “adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). This is why Paul says that a believing woman who sinfully divorces should “remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” (1 Cor. 7:10-11). If she repents from her sin of unbiblical divorce, the true fruits of that repentance would be to seek reconciliation with her former husband (Matt. 5:23-24). The same is true for a man who divorces unbiblically (1 Cor. 7:11). The only time such a person could remarry another is if the former spouse remarries, proves to be an unbeliever, or dies, in which cases reconciliation would no longer be possible.

The Bible also gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds and there is still a responsibility to reconcile, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12).

Rev. 7/26/12

# Cohabitation and Sexual Purity

## Introduction

This is a positional statement on Auburn Grace Community Church's beliefs concerning cohabitation and sexual purity upon the necessary application of our faith to life and practice.

## What We Believe About Cohabitation and Sexual Purity

With the breakdown in the moral fiber of society, acceptance of cohabitation has become commonplace. What was called "shacking up" and had negative consequences 20 years ago has become normal behavior for couples "testing" their relationship. Unfortunately this practice has crept into the Christian community, with more and more professing Christians living together before marriage. The reasons are endless, "It saves us money," "We're going to get married eventually anyway," "What difference does a piece of paper make?" "We're committed to each other," "We want to make sure we are right for each other," and the list goes on.

There are also several social issues that give rise to the increasing cohabitation trend. There is a breakdown in personal morality even in the church. Sexual values have changed and weakened personal commitment to purity that has led to compromising of the truth.

The question is, is this acceptable for a Christian? What does the Bible say about this growing trend? The Bible's answer is unequivocal. Sexual impurity of any kind and cohabitation is not acceptable for the professing Christian. As Christians we have been purchased with a price. Of course that price was Jesus Christ going to the cross to die for our sins, to redeem us and spare us the consequences of eternal separation from Him. *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1Corinthians 6:19,20)."* In order to honor God, there must be obedience. God requires we be holy and pure instruments to be used by Him (2Timothy 2:20-21). The commands about sexual purity are clear in scripture and the boundaries are found in the married relationship, therefore sexual purity is not an option for an obedient follower of Christ. *"...for this is God's will, your sanctification: that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God...for God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification". (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5,7)*

Scripture defines fornication as "sexual intercourse between unmarried persons". It's clearly recognized as a sin which God forbids and includes negative consequences (Hebrew 13:4). Any sex outside of marriage is a violation of God's law with serious consequences. In John 4:17-18 we see an encounter between the woman at the well and Jesus. He said to her, *"Go call your husband and come here."* *The woman answered and said "I have no husband."* *Jesus said to her, "You have answered correctly, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have answered truly."* "She was living conjugally with a man who was not her husband. By such an explicate statement, our Lord rejected the notion that when two people live together it constitutes marriage. Biblically, marriage is always restricted to a public, formal, official, and recognized covenant" (MacArthur Study Bible). This means cohabitation is a continual sin that a believer is willing to disregard in order to fulfill their own desires, thus separating themselves from the total blessings of our Lord. Sexual purity is inseparable from the committed Christian life. If you are not living in sexual purity, God will not hear your other prayers until you offer the prayer of confession

and repentance and commit yourself to a life of holiness. *“If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable (Proverbs 28:9).” “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened (Psalm 66:18).” “When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 7:13).*

## **Our Faith-Based Position on Cohabitation and Sexual Immorality**

In accordance with the above described truths as found in scripture and our belief in the need for a practice of these beliefs, it is our position that anyone participating in or condoning such behavior will be subject to church discipline and forfeit ministry opportunities at Auburn Grace Community Church.

Rev. 7/26/12

# Same-Sex Marriage

## Introduction

This is a positional statement on Auburn Grace Community Church's beliefs concerning same-sex marriage upon the necessary application of our faith to life and practice.

## What We Believe About Marriage

We believe based on the teaching of the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments that marriage is an institution ordained by God from the foundation of the world, and intended as a lifelong union of one man and one woman. This idea is supported by the account of creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. Genesis 1:26-28 provides that God created man in His own image, both male and female. The passage implies that a unity of one man and one woman is in some way necessary to fully represent the image of God in mankind.

Genesis chapter 2 provides a more detailed account in which God created the first man, Adam, and decided that it was not good for him to be alone (Genesis 2:18). God indicated that He would make "a suitable helper for him." God brought all of the animals to Adam, but none of them was a suitable helper for him, so God then created Eve, the first woman, from part of Adam himself. God did not create a second man to be Adam's helpmate, or an assortment of multiple women, but rather one woman. Together they were man and wife and had "no shame" or sin in their union with each other (Genesis 2:15-25).

Jesus, the fully divine and fully human incarnation of God and Lord of His church, reaffirmed the teaching of the Old Testament when He said, as recorded in Matthew 19:4-6, "Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

The Apostle Paul, writing authoritatively under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, states in Ephesians 5:22-32 that marriage is not merely a human institution, but is a special divine metaphor that is supposed to illustrate the union of Christ and the church. For this reason also, only a union between a man and a woman can be a proper marriage because a union between two men, two women, or one man and multiple women or any collection of people could not properly illustrate the relationship between Christ and His church.

Our church follows what the Bible reveals as the "sure foundation" of the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles (Matthew 7:24-29 and I Corinthians 14:37). The church is called to teach and practice these teachings and is not at liberty to depart from them for a different authority if it is to authentically bear the name "Christian." Though we strive to live peaceably with all people and to obey legitimate government authority, in instances involving matters as foundational as marriage, we must ultimately obey God rather than man if the two come into conflict (Acts 4:18-22).

## Our Faith-Based Position on Marriage

In accordance with the above described beliefs and our belief in the need to practice these beliefs, the facilities of this church may only be used for marriage ceremonies that approve, honor, and support marriages of one man and one woman. No pastor or member of the church staff shall officiate at any ceremony designed to celebrate, promote, create, or approve of any other type of union. Nor may any member of the church enter into any other type of union without being subject to church discipline.

Rev. 7/26/12