

STATEMENT FROM THE ELDERS

Recently, the elders of this congregation presented a statement to the church regarding the basic position taken at Woodland Oaks on various matters of doctrine. That statement was written out and read word-for-word to the congregation. The elders want to make that Statement available to anyone who might want to read it. The full text of that statement follows:

It is not about us and what we want.

It IS about God and what He wants.

We try to keep this in mind in everything we do.

We want to be as sure as we can that we ARE doing what God wants us to do—in all things.

We want to start by saying thank you for this time to share from our hearts some of our thoughts regarding matters that affect this Congregation of the Lord's Church. We have prayerfully considered this discourse for some time. Your elders love each and every one of you and want you to know that we take our shepherding responsibilities very seriously.

We are all hearing about a number of changes that are taking place in our country, in our culture, in our community, within denominational groups and changes within our own brotherhood. What we are saying today is not intended in any way as judgment toward other congregations who are making changes in the way they are doing some things with regard to worship and teaching. That is not the point or intent of this talk.

We want to share with you our thoughts and beliefs with regard to a few of these things that seem to be changing within our brotherhood. They are:

- The name of the Church
- Singing – **Acapella** vs Instrumental Accompaniment
- Communion – what it is and how and why we observe it the way we do.
- Baptism as it relates to God's plan for the salvation of mankind.
- Men and Women's role in the Church and at home.
- The way we make decisions as an eldership.
- Handling Personal Conflict within the body and "Lobby Meetings."
- Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage

The name of the Church

Throughout time, it seems that mankind has always been restless and looking for ways to calm his restlessness. Usually this is done through some form of change. Change unto itself is not always bad. We have a change in seasons which is good, a woman will change her last name to honor her husband when she gets married, a person will change their way of life from one without Christ to one of having a

Christ centered life and these are good kinds of changes with purpose and need. Today however, there is another form of change afoot in the Lord's Church. That change is to take Christ's name out of the name of the Church or to put it in such small print, that it can be easily overlooked.

Is there more than one Biblical way to refer to the Lord's Church? I just did. The answer to this is YES! The Church is spoken of in several different terms in the New Testament.

Jesus refers to it as "MY Church, (Matthew 16-18). In (acts8:1) it is called "The Church" or the "Called Out" from the Greek word Ecclesia. In "1 Corinthians 1:2), it is called the Church of God and in (Romans 16:16) the Apostle Paul refers to various local Churches or congregations as "Churches of Christ" showing that they belong to Christ Jesus.

In (Ephesians 4:12) it is referred to as the "Body of Christ", in (1 Timothy 3:15) it is referred to as the "Church of the Living God" and in "Hebrews 12:23) it is referred to as the Church of the First Born: again pointing to the anointed and crucified Savior as its head or owner.

As your elders, we are not ashamed of the name of Jesus and see no need to change the name that identifies our congregation as CHURCH OF CHRIST. We believe that the name is one that is acceptable to God. The name Church of Christ shows that the Church belongs to Jesus. Jesus gave his life on the cross so that we can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life with Him. What better way to honor Jesus than to include His name in the name of HIS Church.

Therefore, we will continue to honor Jesus by not removing His name from His Church. If name change is being promoted because of problems (perceived or real) either by or because of the way we as a body have conducted ourselves then let's change US to be more in the likeness of Him so that He can be glorified through us, His Church. AMEN

Singing – A Capella vs. instrumental accompaniment

We believe there is sufficient evidence in scripture with regard to how we should or can enter into praise to God through song in our worship assembly. We believe that acapella singing allows us to worship together as a body firmly within what is pleasing and acceptable to God.

Christians are to do all in the name of Christ. That is, by His authority (Colossians 3:17). There is no command authorizing the use of instruments in Christian worship, and there is no example of their use in Christian worship found in the New Testament. We want to worship God acceptably and to respect the silence of God's Word in this matter.

What is commanded?

(Ephesians 5:18 -20) "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."

After being beaten and thrown into prison, Paul and Silas prayed and sang together. (Acts 16:25) “But about midnight Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”

I believe from this story that God too heard the songs of Paul and Silas, just as He heard their prayers and delivered them and claimed the Philippian jailer and his household for His very own through their worship. We believe that singing songs of praise to God is the pattern we find in the New Testament and is acceptable to Him. It is the pattern of worship to God that we will shepherd and teach in this place.

Communion – what it is and how and why we observe it the way we do.

With respect to communion, from (Acts 20:7) and (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), we believe the pattern of New Testament Christianity in God’s Word instructs us to gather every first day of the week, which for us is Sunday. In conjunction with this gathering, we believe there is to be a time set aside for remembering together the risen Christ and the forgiveness of sins promised in God’s Word.

In (Matthew 26:26-28), Christ has commanded us to “... eat of His body and... drink of His blood” through the symbols of unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. In this way, we commune with Jesus Christ and are reminded of His sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins and we are to do so until we can do this with Him. Remembrance and anticipation are two things in this gathering and participation that call us to the feet of our Savior in thanksgiving and praise both now and forever. We believe that partaking of the memorial emblems as instituted by Christ on the night He was betrayed is to be done every Sunday when we gather together and is to be done in remembrance of Him.

Baptism as it relates to Gods plan for the salvation of mankind.

We believe that scripture plainly teaches that baptism (immersion) is an action taken by faith. We believe and teach that baptism is an act of submission to God’s will and in response to the Good News (Gospel) story of Christ the risen Savior. We also believe that it is the point at which we somehow come into contact with the blood of Christ which cleanses us from our sins (we are forgiven) and we believe and teach that those who are baptized into Christ Jesus must rise to walk a new life in Jesus Christ.

Peter was as specific with the command as we could reasonably hope with regard to this teaching. When asked by those who participated either actively or passively in the crucifixion of Christ, “What must we do to be saved?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

We believe and teach that being baptized allows one to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We will continue to teach that baptism is one of the important things man must do in response to the Gospel of Christ in order to be added to the Kingdom of Christ – the Church.

By biblical example in the book of Acts, the accounts of conversion or of those being added to the Church by God, all either imply that baptism occurred or plainly state that baptism was a part of their conversion process. We teach that biblical example baptism is done for one who is convicted of their own sin's, recognizes that they are not in a right relationship with God, repent of sin in their life, confess the name of Jesus as the Son of God and submit to the watery grave of baptism. These things imply that this person must be of sufficient age and maturity to do these things. We do not teach "inherent sin" nor do we teach or practice "infant baptism." You will hear us teach what God has said about one being added to the Church in our Bible Classes and from our pulpit. Being added to the Church will always refer to someone or people who have baptized for the remission of sins.

Anyone can come here to our worship assembly and participate in our corporate worship to God. We will however, only name as members of the Lord's Church in this congregation, those who have been baptized into Christ. We will teach that baptism cannot be set apart from God's plan for saving mankind.

The role of men and women in the Church and at Home

Concerning the role of men and women, we have these things to say. We believe that God set out a pattern in the relationship between man and woman from the very beginning when He created Adam and Eve. We believe that God made man and woman different but equal and that He has clearly communicated roles for each and a relationship that He patterned in His relationship with His people in the Old Testament and in the Church today. God has clearly placed the responsibility for spiritual leadership with men with regard to the home and family as well as within the Church. This principle resonates throughout the Bible and is emphasized by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 as well as in 1 Timothy, chapter 2. We believe that women have the God ordained right to be led by men in worship. We believe that God expects these men to be respectable men who humbly submit themselves to Him. We believe that men are responsible for spiritual leadership in the home and that those women among us who do not have that leadership the home should live Godly lives before their unbelieving husbands in order to lead them to God. We believe the scriptures plainly teach us that men are to serve under the authority of Christ; and women are to serve under the authority of their husbands. In regard to our life together in the Church, women should serve under the male leadership of the Church. This in no way teaches that men are superior to women but they have been given different roles. We encourage the men of Woodland Oaks Church of Christ to assume their role in the home and take responsibility for the secular and spiritual leadership of their families as well as for leadership responsibilities in God's Church family in order to fulfill God's will for you as a husband, father and Church leader.

Within this context, we believe that the woman's role in the Church should in no way compromise or usurp the authority of male, spiritual leadership within the worship assembly; bible classes or n congregational activities.

To clarify, we want to preserve the “traditional” role of women as we have known it. It is appropriate and we encourage the women of our church family to take an active part in mixed class and group discussions under the direction of male leadership but not from a posture of leading the discussion. Of course, this does not apply to groups that consist wholly of women. If you are not sure that a role you are in is appropriate or you are asked to do something that you think violates these principles of men and women’s roles, please talk to us and please be thoughtful and careful with regard to these issues.

The burden of spiritual leadership has clearly been thrust on men and men cannot subrogate those roles to women either by default or by intent. We believe that this would be a clear violation of God’s will for His people.

There may be various opinions and even disagreement about the meaning of principles concerning many issues found in the Bible. These can be very emotional and divisive. We hope that your understanding of how we will shepherd this flock helps you understand how and why we take this position with regard to men’s and women’s roles.

The way we make decisions as an eldership.

We have talked today about a number of areas where your elders have chosen a path. It seems appropriate that we share the way that we make these decisions. If something is commanded, there is no decision and we follow the command. If the direction is not clear we look to scripture and prayerfully seek God’s guidance and second we look at what we know of the actions taken by the early church. There are probably many acceptable solutions to some of the questions we ask. We search for the answer that MOST likely to be pleasing to God. If there is a solution that we understand to be CLEARLY acceptable to God and a solution that “MIGHT” be acceptable, we strive to pick the solution or path MOST LIKELY to be pleasing. The method is not meant to stifle innovation but to guide us in a way that serves God and produces the most unity through not arguing over “WHERE IS THE EDGE?”

Handling personal conflict and “LOBBY DISCUSSIONS”

Over the last year, we have had some classes and sermons on personal conflict. Jesus’ prayer was that the church would have the same unity that Jesus has with God, His father. (John 17:20-21) If you have an issue with someone, we would request that you go to that person and discuss the concern. If someone comes to you and wants to discuss a problem they are having with someone other than you, we ask that you ask the person coming to you if they have talked with the other person. If you come to one of the elders and start to discuss a problem you are having with a person or a perceived violation of God’s word, our first question will be “Have you talked with the other person”. Talking with someone other than that member of the conflict, concern or issue breeds disunity and creates an additional problem such as gossip. May we all strive for unity in God and learn to accept differences that are not important.

(Matthew 18:15 or Luke 17:3) As Elders of this congregation, we are very interested in issues that are bothering you. Often we are stopped in the lobby or between classes to discuss your concerns. This is

not really an appropriate time or place to properly discuss important matters. In addition, we like to have at least two elders in these important discussions. Therefore, we want to encourage you to contact any of the elders and let us know that you would like to talk and the urgency of your need. If it is comfortable for you and time permits, we would ask you to come to one of our regular meetings on the first or third Wednesday night of each month after Bible class. If you are not comfortable coming to coming to the meeting or time does not permit, we will establish a time and place that is convenient for you to meet with at least two of the elders. Please know that we want to listen to what is important to you and join with you in prayer and serious discussion and hopefully resolution with regard to whatever your conflict, concern or problem.

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

Introduction:

Your elders have been in in an extended period of prayer, Bible study, and mediation while preparing this statement concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage. We have counseled with preachers and other respected church leaders and read numerous well written articles and books. Most of us have been impacted in some way by this topic. Our purpose is not to criticize or stand in judgment of anyone with respect to decisions that have been made in the past. Our desire is to provide scriptural principles for this congregation which will serve as guidelines for the direction and counseling of God's family at Woodland Oaks Church of Christ.

We are especially concerned because of the prevalence of divorce in our society and the occurrence in the Churches of Christ. The laws of the land now provide a variety of grounds for a legal divorce. In fact, a divorce may be granted for no reason at all – a no fault divorce in which no marital wrong has been committed. It is estimated that one half of all marriages in our time will end in divorce. Although the statistics may be lower among members in the church of Christ, the problem of an increasing divorce rate is still an alarming trend. Clearly, divorce and remarriage has become more acceptable. Ministries serving those who have been divorced ae becoming more commonplace in today's Christian culture and the reason God allows for remarriage ae being debated in many Christian groups.

In this somewhat confusing scene, we are especially concerned that our children clearly understand what God expects of them as they mature and select marriage companions. We want them to choose a Christian as a partner because the choice of a spouse will have a major influence on their ability to serve God in a faithful and meaningful way for the rest of their life. The dangers facing our children making such a choice are many if he or she has no clear guidance about what God requires in a marriage covenant. Such guidance is a family responsibility but the church also bears responsibility for instruction, encouragement and counseling.

We want to state clearly our understanding of the marriage relationship, what marriage and divorce mean to God and Biblical principles permitting remarriage following a divorce. We also want this to be an indication of how we, as your shepherds, will counsel concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage.

God's vision of marriage

In the beginning, God created humankind as male and female with the intent that a single male and a single female would join together for life and procreate. Since God thus instituted marriage, we should look to God for guidance on how this relationship should function. Children are born into a family and develop relationships with their father and mother. Marriage changes those relationships and creates a new family. (Mark 10:6-8; Matthew 19:4-6; Genesis 2:24) "But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

It is not necessary for a man or a woman ever to marry. If the individual can live without sexual misconduct, Paul reasoned (1 Corinthians 7: 1 & 8) that remaining single is an option. A single person is able to dedicate himself or herself totally to the service of God. However, Paul recognized (1 Corinthians 7:9) that few might be able to control their sexual urges; so most people should marry.

In marriage, the man is called the husband and is given certain responsibilities:

1. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy...." (Ephesians 5:23)
2. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for to make her holy...."(Ephesians 5:25; see also Colossians 3:19)
3. "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." (1 Peter 3:7)
4. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21)

In marriage, the woman is called a wife and is given the following responsibilities:

- 1." Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (Ephesians 5:24; see also Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1-6)
2. The LORD GOD SAID, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."(Genesis 2:18)
3. "Then they (older women) can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God." (Titus 2:4, 5)

In marriage, the husband and wife have mutual responsibilities:

1. "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children." (Deuteronomy 5:6, 7)

2. "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (1 Corinthians 7:2-5)

It should be noted that it might be easier for a wife to submit if her husband is loving or for a husband to lead if the wife were submissive. However, none of these responsibilities is preceded by an "if" statement that would make them conditional. The husband is to fulfill his role regardless of the actions of his wife and the wife is to fulfill her role regardless of the actions of her husband.

When two people are married, their relationship to all other people is changed, but their relationship with God is not changed. A person should never let any human relationship, even marriage, impact his or her love and devotion to God.

Marriage and the Family

The plan God had for man at the very beginning involved the formation of families. Man was created male and female (Genesis 1:27). Adam and Eve and their children formed the first family. "Family" is a demonstration of the relationship God the Father desires with all mankind as His children. God shows His love and care for mankind as a loving father does with his own wife and children. A properly functioning family teaches the children about love, responsibility and obedience. An unmarried couple should not live together as a family.

In (Matthew 19:3) when Jesus was asked about divorce, He responded by citing (Genesis 2:24) about the two becoming one flesh. Jesus then added, "They are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." In marriage, the husband-wife union is something God has accomplished, and even though God's work is unseen, man should not attempt to separate the two. "Till death do us part..." is a clear understanding on man's part that God intends that separation occurs only when one of the marriage partners dies (Romans 7:1-3). Therefore, God's intent is marriage for a lifetime.

Divorce

The attitude of God about divorce is plainly revealed in (Malachi 2:13-16). The Jews asked Malachi why God no longer accepted their offerings. He replied, "It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His and why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 'I hate divorce says the LORD God of Israel.'"

Paul gives “the command of the Lord” in (1 Corinthians 7:10-11); “A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife”.

Adultery

In (Matthew 5:31, 32 and 19:9), Jesus allows divorce for sexual immorality (adultery).

In the society in which Jesus lived, it had become acceptable for marriages to be dissolved for almost any reason. Jesus gives a fundamental principle which is applicable to every age: “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.” Jesus’ “exception phrase” does not demand or require that a divorce occur, but it allows it. If the offended spouse can forgive such betrayal, it is to be recommended. Serious, sincere effort should be given to restore the betrayed trust.

If, however, the betraying spouse is unrepentant or if the betrayed spouse is unable to overcome the lack of trust due to the adultery, it is assumed that a divorce on the basis of adultery leaves the innocent party free to remarry.

An unbelieving spouse chooses to abandon a marriage

Are there any other circumstances in which God allows a marriage to be dissolved, other than by death?

Paul discusses this topic in (1 Corinthians 7). Beginning in verse 12, he addresses the case where one spouse is or becomes a Christian while the other remains an unbeliever. Paul urges them to remain together and instructs the believer not to divorce the unbeliever. When one partner is a Christian; the unbeliever is sanctified by God so that he can bless that family. The Christian should hope to win over the unbeliever. (Verse 16). “But if the unbeliever leaves (verse 15), let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such cases.”

What the Bible says about who can marry

God is very specific in His instruction to man as to who can marry. Any man or woman who has never been married is free to marry under the definition of a man and a woman marrying one another and becoming one flesh. However, God recommends that the Christians marry other Christians (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). In (1 Corinthians 7), Paul gives instruction to widows about marrying again. If they choose to remarry, they can do so without sinning. The major stipulation is that they must remarry only in the Lord (verse 39). This instruction would also apply to the widowers who wish to remarry. Paul also offers advice to younger widows to remarry, bear children, keep house and give the enemy no occasion for reproach (1 Timothy 5:14).

God has left some very specific instructions as to who can and cannot remarry and not sin in the process of the new marriage. The following are the options as given by God for the divorced individual:

1. While not specifically addressed, we feel that it is a reasonable and safe assumption: If there is any doubt about the status of a divorce, the individual should remain single and not marry again. The divorced couple does have the option to reconcile and renew their marriage contract.
2. Another situation in which an individual can be free to remarry after a divorce is when the sin of adultery has occurred. As stated in (Matthew 19:3-9), the offended spouse is free to remarry and this new marriage union is not shrouded in sin. If adultery does occur in a marriage, the offended spouse can forgive the offending spouse and continue in the marriage.

Regarding “adultery in the heart”

“You have heard that it was said to people long ago ‘do not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.” (Matthew 5:21-22)

In a similar teaching, Jesus addresses lust which is another sin that occurs in the heart. “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perishes, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” – (Matthew 5:27-30)

These passages deal with sin in our hearts and our relationship with God. They do not apply to physical murder or the physical act of adultery. Just as the reason that we cannot treat being angry with your brother in the same way we would if someone actually takes his or her brother’s life, we cannot treat someone who lusts in their heart the same as we would someone who actually commits adultery.

This is not to trivialize the seriousness of the sin of lusting, but rather to say that Jesus did not give this as a reason for divorce. Instead of one seeking to use adultery in the heart as grounds for divorcing an offending spouse, let the effort be to help the spouse overcome the lust that led them to commit the adultery in the heart.

One other area deserving comment is when a spouse chooses to separate from his/her spouse without invoking a divorce. When this occurs, then neither is free to remarry. They are encouraged to reconcile and continue the marriage. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Message to the Divorced

As your Shepherds, we have a view of our responsibility where marriage, divorce, and remarriage are concerned:

1. God holds marriage to be sacred and to be a lifetime relationship.
2. Divorce of any kind involves sin, just like any other sin.
3. God hates divorce, but has made allowance for it under certain circumstances that have already been stated.

We realize there are some families of Christians today that, for one reason or another, have been married, divorced, and remain single; or married, divorced and remarried. We believe that what we have stated concerning God's view of marriage, divorce, and remarriage is based on God's word and at the same time, may leave some with questions about a specific set of circumstances.

Your elders don't have all the answers. Some of these questions have only a divine answer, that humanly speaking we can't answer. After many months of discussion, study of scripture and prayer, we have concluded that we can't satisfactorily answer every single situation. We cannot speak for the way God will judge when it comes to every divorce. We can only provide scriptural counsel where there is scripture that addresses the specific circumstances. God has placed this limitation on us. Individually, we must all take responsibility for our relationship with God and the decisions we make.

Our counsel, in every situation, is to study the scriptures objectively with the realization that your decision may affect the eternal destination of you and your entire family and those who may follow your example. Our guiding principle in, this and all other matters, is to not loose what the Lord has bound and not bind what the Lord has loosed.

If your study of scripture leads you to understand that you have sinned, repent of that sin. Confess your sins to God, make the change in your life that God requires and continuously seek God in prayer.

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." (Philippians 2:12, 13)

We love you. And we want for you the peace that comes from a firm understanding of who you are and whose you are spiritually. You belong to Christ Jesus, crucified, risen Son of the true and living God of Creation. God wants for you to be at peace in your life with regard to your relationship to Him and to His Church. We believe that the things WE are teaching as a congregation and how WE handle ourselves with regard to relationships and roles and how WE conduct our worship to God is acceptable to God and we believe it with all our hearts

May we forever be teachable but may we also be steadfast in our faith and in our sincere, intellectually honest approach to serving the true and living God with all our hearts and all of our minds and all of strength.

That's it. It is finished. We hope that these words are a comfort and encouragement to you.