

Statement of Position on Divorce and Remarriage

In approaching the problems brought on by the evils of divorce and remarriage, we need first to understand the Scriptural significance of *marriage*. Marriage was ordained by God in the creation and is confirmed in the New Testament by Jesus Christ. Marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman, dissoluble only by death. It involves a voluntary, unreserved commitment to each other for life and supersedes all other human relationships. Marriage is a union which is recognized and validated by God, whether the contract is solemnized by the church or by the state and whether the contracting persons are believers or unbelievers. Gen. 2:21-24; Matt. 19:3-6; Mk. 10:6-9; Heb. 13:4.

In order to establish a Scriptural position on divorce and remarriage, we must also consider the Biblical teaching on *adultery*. In both Old and New Testaments the unfaithfulness of God's people is referred to as adultery in a figurative sense. Literally, adultery means voluntary sexual relations between a married man and woman not his wife, or between a married woman and a man not her husband. However, the Scriptures teach that adultery involves more than the act of immorality. Adultery is also a breach of fidelity between husband and wife. Jesus said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth [or continues to commit] adultery against her." Such persons enter upon an adulterous relationship. Jer. 3; Hosea 1, 2, 3; Matt. 16:4; James 4:4; Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mk. 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:3.

The indissolubility of the marriage bond is a principle that is basic to a consistent interpretation and application of Bible teachings in relation to problems issuing from divorce and remarriage. When confronted with the question of divorce, Jesus based His response solidly on God's ordinance in creation when He said, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder [to divide or separate]."

Scripturally, there is nothing which breaks the marriage bond except death. The act of adultery does not dissolve the marriage bond, although it decidedly affects the quality of a marriage relationship and leaves a

permanent scar on the persons involved. A legal document called *divorce*, from God's point of view, does not break the marriage bond, else remarriage would not be adultery. Even the conversion of one of two unbelieving married partners does not dissolve the marriage bond. If the unbelieving partner should leave, the marriage bond continues. Divorced persons who enter a second marriage relation while their first partners are still living may be recognized by the state as legally married, but "from the beginning it was not so." Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:6-8; Mk. 10:4-9; Prov. 6:32, 33; Rom.7:1-3; I Cor. 7:10-16, 39.

The church is called to minister with loving and caring consideration to those who are caught in the tangles of divorce and remarriage. Concern for their personal salvation should motivate us to lead them to a full commitment to Jesus Christ and to show them from the Scriptures those holy principles which regulate the marriage relationship. While the final decision to separate from an adulterous relationship would be voluntary, God requires it for reconciliation to Him. John 4:13-18; 8:1-11; Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-3; Col. 4:6.

Divorce was granted in the Old Testament only as a concession and was neither commanded nor commended by God. Divorce is clearly depicted in the Scriptures as being in direct contradiction to the original purpose of God and the true nature of marriage. Principles of the New Testament would allow a divorced person two options. He may remain unmarried or be reconciled to his partner. Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-8; Mk. 10:2-9; I Cor. 7:10, 11.

If the divorced person remarries, he faces far greater and more serious complications. Both single persons and persons previously married can be involved in an adulterous remarriage. Circumstances may vary but the consequences are quite similar. Complications issuing from adulterous remarriages are legion and do not have easy answers. For many, their first marriage was contracted before conversion. Since the Scriptures teach that marriage is validated by God, whether contracted by believers or unbelievers, we believe the first marriage is still binding as long as both are living. Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:3; Heb. 13:4.

Some couples claim that in their adulterous remarriage they have discovered real marital compatibility. This only points up a grave weakness in modern society. Marriage is depicted as an experience of selfish gratification rather than a commitment to life-long fidelity. I Cor. 6:9-20; I Thess. 4:3-8; Eph. 5:22-33.

A very real test comes when children are born in an adulterous marriage relationship. To dissolve such a family unit may cause the children extreme suffering. However, children are also caused to suffer similarly from divorce of original partners or from being born out of wedlock. Such consequences are touching, and are a grim reminder that in the wake of sin there are many innocent sufferers. Prov. 6:32, 33; 13:15; Gal. 6:7, 8.

To legally dissolve an adulterous remarriage relationship in our culture generally requires either annulment or divorce. If to effect either annulment or divorce means that one partner must become an aggressor at law against the other, such an action would be in conflict with the Bible teaching on nonresistance. We believe that a simple separation would be consistent with the teaching of Scripture. I Cor. 6:1-8.

In keeping with the Bible principles of practical holiness, Christian expediency, and a blameless witness, we believe it would be inconsistent for couples who sincerely repent of their adulterous marriage relationship to continue to live in the same dwelling or to maintain close relationships. However, since there are often children born in adulterous marriage relationships, Christian integrity would require that a believing father bear responsibility for the material support and care of his children. Rom. 13:14; I Thess. 5:22; Heb. 12:1; I Cor. 6:9-12; 10:23; Eph. 5:8-17; Phil. 2:15, 16; I Peter 2:12; I Tim. 5:8.

There are cases where an adulterous remarriage relationship is legally and legitimately dissolved. If a person involved in such a relationship was previously married and there is a mutual desire on the part of the original partners to be reunited, there is no New Testament principle that forbids it. The teaching of the New Testament is that the original marriage bond is indissoluble, except by death, and the tenor of the New Testament is reconciliation and return. On the other hand, if a person involved in an adulterous marriage relationship was previously single and desires to be

legitimately married, the case is more complex. While such a marriage may not be specifically forbidden in the New Testament, we believe it would not be an expedient practice for the church to follow. Matt. 19:6-12; Mark 10:9-12; Rom. 7:1-3; I Cor. 6:9-12; 7, 10, 11; 10:23; Gal. 6:7.

In conclusion, we believe the church is called to demonstrate the holiness and permanency of the marriage relationship. Furthermore, she is commissioned to make disciples of all nations and to teach them how to follow the commands of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Officially adopted as a statement of position and policy on June 24, 1983, by the Southeastern Mennonite Conference. Adopted by SAMC.