

POSITION PAPER
ON DIVORCE

PARADISE MENNONITE CHURCH

1983

- I. **Marriage** Marriage is a God-ordained institution. We believe that a biblical view of the marriage relationship presupposes:

Monogamy – God intends for **one** man and **one** woman to be united in an exclusive union, a unique bonding and blending of two into one.

Heterosexuality – Marriage by nature anticipates sexual union of male and female. All other forms of sexual relationships are considered perversions of the norm and are forbidden in scripture.

Permanence – Marriage vows are made to God on an unconditional basis, and are regarded by Him as sacred and binding for life.

Overtness – God's plan for leaving and cleaving suggests a public declaration of intent to live together as married. This implies compliance with the civil and social regulations designed to formalize this for the public record.

- II. **Divorce** God hates divorce! (Mal. 2:14-16) To disrupt (separate), pervert (polygamy, homosexuality, etc.), or adulterate (bring a foreign party into), this pure one-on-one unique relationship, is to violate and infringe on the integrity of marriage, and to sin against the will and intent of the Creator. God rejects this as completely counter to what is right, good, appropriate, consistent and pure.

Jesus is explicit. Divorce equals adultery (except in the case where porneia (Gk.) has occurred. (Matt. 5:32, 19:9)

The question is not if there is an exception made, but rather to what this word porneia refers. In scripture the word is used in both broad and narrow senses. We take the position that here porneia refers to any illicit sexual act on the part of one (or both) of the partners. We hold that when a persistent pursuit of this illicit activity leads to eventual divorce, God is willing to concede the dissolution of this marriage. We believe that though God deplores divorce, He also despises the pollution porneia introduces into a holy and sacred union, and consequently will regard this union as irreparably broken, in fact forbade that it ever be resumed when remarriage had taken place. (Deut. 24: 2-4) Divorce is an especially serious failure, because of the close parallel marriage represents to the permanent commitment Christ has to the Church. It is not however; a sin which cannot be confessed and forgiven when true repentance is evident.

- III. **Application**

- A. To All: We must do everything within our reach, to nurture and encourage, and enrich the marriages in our congregation. We will continue to hold high the standards of marriage God has given. We will insist on permanence; we will demand that vows be made unconditionally; we must recommit ourselves to God, and to our partners, for life.

- B. To Those With Marital Difficulties: Marriage, being the most intimate and intricate of human relationships, is susceptible to breakdown and we must not pretend it does not happen. Typically however, when we are struggling we try to hide our struggle, and so miss out on the aid which others could render in our behalf. When a marriage within the church family is struggling, the church, if it is a healthy body, ought to mobilize for the stabilizing of that marriage. Therefore, 1) we encourage couples who experience difficulties to begin seeking help early. Your pastors, your brothers and sisters are for such a time as this. 2) we encourage the congregation to take seriously their responsibility for nurturing and ministering reconciliation to one another. (Gal. 6: 2)
- C. To Those Considering Divorce: Inasmuch as God hates divorce, we will never encourage or counsel a couple to pursue divorce, rather, reconciliation. Even in the case where porneia has clearly been established, forgiveness and reconciliation is still God's ideal solution. If it becomes clear that reconciliation is apparently unachievable, we believe that God permits divorce only if the other partner insists (I Cor. 7:15) on divorce, and/or (Matt. 19:9) when porneia has adulterated the marriage. The scriptures do not demand that the believer resist divorce in this instance.
- D. To Those Who Have Divorced: As long as both parties have not remarried, we urge the pursuit of reconciliation. When true repentance is evident, the body can, and must extend forgiveness and restoration. We believe that singleness is preferable to remarriage and should be given consideration.
- E. To Those Considering Remarriage: In the case where divorce has occurred, but it has not been established that porneia (sustained illicit sexual activity) has been a factor, we do not believe that this divorce fits the exception permitted, and therefore would not participate in a marriage (i.e. remarriage) ceremony.

When porneia has been established as a factor in the divorce, as pastors we will give consideration to participation only when all of the following are met:

- The person(s) has in our judgment, demonstrated genuine repentance, spiritual growth and maturity.
- The person(s) has demonstrated integrity by refraining from pursuing new marital relationships for what seems to be an adequate length of time.
- The person(s) can testify to a clear conscience about going ahead with a new marriage relationship.
- That both persons to be married are willing to commit themselves to the "one-anothering" of the congregation, and show this by establishing membership with us.
- The congregation has given their approval for their pastor(s) to participate in the ceremony.

- F. To Those Divorced and Remarried:
- (a) prior to coming into our congregation: When recognition is made of sin, when repentance is evident, and when affirmation is made concerning this position paper, we are prepared to process membership for these persons in accord with normal procedures. When received they will be entitled to full privileges and fellowship though we believe that discretion should be used in considering them for leadership positions.
- (b) in rejection of the counsel of this position paper: We regard this as a rejection of the counsel of the brotherhood; a refusal to submit to its standards; and consequently a withdrawal from membership in this congregation.