



Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

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(This doctrinal position statement was formulated by a five-man bishop committee and ratified by the Amish Mennonite [Beachy] ministers assembled at New Holland, PA, April 1-3, 2003.)

Our effort to carefully state the biblical position concerning divorce and remarriage requires us first to understand the scriptural and spiritual significance of MARRIAGE. Marriage was ordained by God in Creation (Genesis 2:21-24) and is confirmed in the New Testament by Jesus Christ (Mark 10:6-9). By virtue of its God-ordained institution, it is to be considered an ordinance of the Church (1 Corinthians 11:2). Marriage is an honorable (Hebrews 13:4) and life-long commitment (Romans 7:2) to an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24) solemnized by vows before God. The marital union is recognized and validated by God, whether the marriage ceremony is conducted by the church or the state and whether the persons are believers or unbelievers. Marriage is a bond that only God can and may dissolve through the death of one partner (1 Corinthians 7:39). Man is not authorized to dissolve what God has joined together (Matthew 19:6). The Bible is clearly committed to the indissolubility of the marriage bond.

Scripturally, NOTHING can break the marriage bond EXCEPT DEATH (Romans 7:1-3).

1. The act of adultery *does not dissolve the marriage bond*, otherwise it would mean that the “bed” is the “highest” of marriage. It should

be quickly pointed out, though, that such unfaithfulness decidedly affects the quality of the marital relationship and leaves a permanent scar on the persons involved (Proverbs 13:15b).

2. From God's point of view, the legal document of divorce, though it is recognized by the world, *does not break the marriage bond*, otherwise a later marital relationship with another partner would not be called "adultery" (Mark 10:11-12).

3. The conversion of one of the marriage partners does not dissolve the marriage bond. If the unbelieving partner should leave, *the marriage bond continues* (1 Corinthians 7:12-14)

4. A divorced person who enters a second marriage relationship while the original partner is still living, indeed, might get recognition from the state as being legally married, but "*from the beginning it was not so*" (Matthew 19:8b). God is NOT pleased with that adulterous marital union. *The first marriage bond is still binding*. The Scriptures lift up a high and holy standard for marriage and God does not sanction the "allowances" and "loopholes" brought forward by the carnal mind of man. (Proverbs 6:32-33)!

The church is called to minister with loving and caring consideration for those who are caught in the tangles of divorce and remarriage (Galatians 6:1-3). Concern for their personal salvation should motivate us to lead them to a full commitment of faith in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). The church has the scriptural responsibility to show such ones the eternal principles from the Scriptures which govern the marriage relationship. While the final decision to separate from an adulterous marital union must be voluntary, **GOD DOES REQUIRE A SEPARATION** to bring about a reconciliation with Himself. (1 Cor. 6:9,10; Heb. 13:4; Rom. 7:1-3) The continuing adulterous marital union is a state of sin and sincere repentance from any state of sin necessitates a separation from that sin.

Divorce was permitted in the Old Testament only "*because of*

the hardness of your hearts" (Matthew 19:8a). Divorce was never commanded (except by instituting "limitation" against its rampant abuse!) nor was it ever commanded by God! Divorce is depicted in the Scriptures as being in direct contradiction to the original purpose of God and the true nature of marriage. *New Testament principles allow a "separated" person only two options: (1) the person must remain unmarried; or (2) the person must be reconciled to his original partner* (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

If the divorced person remarries (anyone other than his first partner), the situation brings forth far more serious complications. This situation is particularly dangerous in that BOTH "single" persons and "previously married" persons *can become involved* in an adulterous marital relationship. Complications arising from adulterous marital relationships are many and do not allow easy answers. A few such situations are listed below:

1. *Some claim their first marriage was contracted before their conversion*. Since the Scriptures teach that marriage is validated by God, whether the persons were believers or unbelievers, *we believe marriage is binding as long as both partners are living* (Romans 7:1-3).

2. *Some claim to have found real compatibility and fulfillment in their second (adulterous) relationship*. This does not justify going against the principles of the word and ignoring the clear commandment of God. Such ones depict marriage as an experience of self-gratification rather than commitment to life-long fidelity. **We believe the first marriage is binding as long as both partners are living** (Romans 7:1-3).

3. *Some claim that to dissolve the second (adulterous) relationship causes the children of that relationship extreme suffering*. We are to be reminded that similar suffering is inflicted upon the children by the divorce from the original partner. Children born out of wedlock experience suffering too! Such instances of suffering are touching and serve to remind us that *"the way of the transgressor is hard"* and

that many innocent people must often suffer in the wake of sin. What we are facing here are the hard consequences of sin! How they tug and pull upon our hearts! Nevertheless, the truth of God's Word cries out: **The first marriage is binding as long as both partners are living** (Romans 7:1-3). To be faithful, we must dissolve the adulterous marital relationship!

4. *To legally dissolve the adulterous marital union in our society requires an "annulment" or a "divorce."* In order to pursue such an end, one of the parties must become an "aggressor at law" against the other. When both parties become Christians, a new complication presents itself. To pursue such a hostile legal agenda is in conflict with the biblical teaching of nonresistance. In a situation where both parties are now embracing the principles of biblical Christianity, we believe that a simple SEPARATION is consistent with the teaching of Scripture (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

5. *Some claim to support the teaching of the church about the unscriptural nature of the adulterous marital union but suggest the possibility of living together, for convenience' sake, but not as husband and wife.* In keeping with the biblical principles of practical holiness, Christian expediency, and blameless witness, **we believe it is inconsistent for couples who sincerely repent of their adulterous marital relationship to continue to live in the same dwelling or in close proximity.** Nevertheless, since there are often children born into adulterous marital unions, and considering the financial needs coming upon the woman, Christian integrity requires the father to bear responsibility for the material support and care of the partner and the children from the adulterous marital relationship.

6. *Some claim, after having been legally and legitimately freed from the adulterous marital union, to have the privilege and right to return to the first marriage partner to fulfill their first vows.* Well-meaning and conscientious Christians are divided on this point. It is our consensus that **the first marriage is binding as long as both of the**

partners are still living (Romans 7:1-3). This is our starting point! It is our desire to lift up marriage to its intended biblical position and to stress its sanctity and permanence! We believe the following guidelines to be consistent with the principles of God's Word as it pertains to this question:

A. Yes, the party legitimately freed from the adulterous marital union may return to his or her partner. Such a return, however, must be conditioned by three factors:

(1) The person must be **FREE AND CLEAR** from any previous adulterous marital relationship.

(2) There must be a **MUTUAL CONSENT AND DESIRE** in **BOTH** of the original partners.

(3) There must be **CLEAR CONSENSUS** on the part of the home church. If these conditions are met, we know of no New Testament principle that forbids reuniting. The teaching of the New Testament is that the original marriage bond is indissoluble, except by death. The Spirit of the New Testament is one of reconciliation and return. It is critical to the life of the church that the home church supports such a move. A mere "majority vote" does not qualify for "solid" support! Without home church support, the couple should refrain from reuniting.

B. If a person involved in an adulterous marital relationship was previously single and is now free from that adulterous union, can such a person be scripturally joined in another marital relationship?

We believe the Scriptures are unmistakably clear on the permanence of a first-time marriage for both individuals. From the words of Jesus Himself, we do not always see clearly all the details for each individual case. However, we believe the safest and most expedient course for such an individual is to remain unmarried as long as the partner of the former union lives. Is it not incumbent on the body of Christ to nurture and provide for such an individual in a manner that makes celibate living not only bearable but a blessing?

Let us not overemphasize the blessings of marriage in ways that make such individuals or other singles among us feel like they cannot attain God's best while remaining unmarried. As we seek to live out our understanding of these important principles, let us take care not to undermine God's original intention or Jesus' own words on the indissolubility of the first marriage.

C. An additional comment: The committee assigned to study this issue is committed to the indissolubility of the original marriage relationship. It is our conclusion that the above referenced position offers a response which honors the Lord and His Word. Necessary to the maintenance of this position is complete dependence upon the heart and mind of Christ. We believe that this position is administratively workable, but this must not bring strife to the local congregation. We advise local ministerial bodies to be diligent in teaching and preaching the sanctity of marriage.

A FINAL WORD

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