

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Position Papers are official documents of the Church that have been approved by its General Presbytery.

This statement on divorce and remarriage was approved as the official statement by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God in August 1973. It was revised by the General Presbytery in August 2008.

Marriage is vital to our nature as human beings in society. God himself instituted marriage by creating and bringing the first man and woman together at the dawn of human creation.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ... The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ... Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (Genesis 1:27; 2:18,22,23).¹

Unfortunately, in the United States, the institution of marriage is in crisis. Recent studies show that about one-third of all Americans who are or have been married have also been divorced at least once. Among self-professed evangelical Christian believers, 26 percent reportedly have been divorced.² In the culture at large, vast segments of the population live in families headed by single parents, either never married or divorced. Many other persons live together in transient relationships of convenience, flouting God's design, as well as the prevailing social science research, for marriage, sexuality, and childrearing.

It is imperative at such a time that the Christian church clarify, teach, and faithfully uphold what the Bible says about marriage. The Church must also speak biblically to the issue of divorce and remarriage, which occur all too often as one, or both, marital partners abandon their Christian ethical commitments and responsibilities.

Statement of Biblical Principles

A careful study of the Old and New Testament Scriptures yields the following salient principles that bear on divorce and remarriage.

The Nature of Marriage

1. Two sexes, male and female, are required to complete the divine image in humankind. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Neither male nor female alone may procreate the race and fulfill the divine purposes.
2. The first woman is described as a "helper suitable" (i.e., his perfect complement) for the man (Genesis 2:18,20), taken from his side, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh (2:23). It is obvious that God meant both the man and the woman to share in privilege and responsibility. Under God, though their roles may sometimes differ, the two sexes are equals. As the apostle Paul would later write, "There is neither ... male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).
3. The way God created human beings to live on the earth and brought them together indicates He intended man and woman for each other (Genesis 2:22-24). Their relationship was to be social as well as physical. "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone' " (Genesis 2:18).
4. Marriage is to be sexually consummated. At the Creator's command, the first man and woman were to "become one flesh" for purposes of procreation, bonding, and mutual pleasure in a safe and loving relationship (Genesis 2:24). Jesus himself reiterated the divine intent (Matthew 19:4,5) and Paul instructed Christian spouses faithfully and regularly to fulfill their sexual responsibilities to each other (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).
5. Marriage is to be heterosexual. The institution of marriage firmly is set within the creation of humans as male and female. God's imperative is, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Homosexual and lesbian unions throughout the biblical record are judged to be sinful (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:9,11). There is no biblical precedent for any homosexual liaison that may be termed "marriage."
6. God intended marriage to be a permanent union. The man was to depart from his parents' home in order to "be united to his wife, and ... become one flesh" with her (Genesis 2:24). Both Jesus (Matthew 19:5) and Paul (Ephesians 5:31) quoted this passage from Genesis as the foundational premise of marriage. Translating Jesus'

quotation, Matthew used a Greek word for “united (kollao)” that means “to be glued to, be closely bound to” (Matthew 19:5). Jesus added, “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (19:6).

7. God intended marriage to be monogamous. The Creator’s acts in establishing marriage are focused on one man and one woman. The order of marriage itself (Genesis 2:24) is directed at a monogamous pair, “man” and “wife” being singular. Polygamy did exist in the Old Testament era, of course. The first case was in Cain’s line (Genesis 4:19) with many Old Testaments examples, including some of the patriarchs, to follow. But polygamy is never held up to be the ideal. The Old Testament writers indirectly criticize polygamy by showing the resultant strife (for example, Genesis 21:9,10; 37:2-36; 2 Samuel 13-18). Passages that idealize marriage normally do so by speaking of one husband and one wife (see Psalm 128:3; Proverbs 5:18; 31:10-29; Ecclesiastes 9:9). Jesus also affirms that God’s ideal from the beginning was monogamy, speaking of “man” and “wife” in the singular, with the “two” becoming one flesh (Matthew 19:5,6). There is no reference to polygamy as a practice of the Early Church; and, in any event, it would be proscribed for leaders by Paul’s references to a “one woman man” (1 Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:6).

8. Marriage is a covenant. It is a solemn binding agreement made first before God and then among people in society. The nature of marriage as a covenant is strongly implied in the marriage order of Genesis 2:24, but is made explicit in Malachi 2:14, “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” (emphasis added). Ezekiel applies the idea of marriage to the relationship between God and Israel. “I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “and you became mine” (16:8, emphasis added). From what is said we see that the husband “gave [a] solemn oath” (pledged faith) to the wife and entered into a covenant not intended to be broken. Significantly, the biblical marriage ceremony was a joyous public event in which the two partners solemnized their covenant with God and community.

9. Marriage is a relationship of mutually sacrificial love. It perhaps is best described in the words of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians that instructed wives to “submit to your husbands as to the Lord” (5:22) and to “respect” their husbands (5:33). Then, lest those instructions be misinterpreted, Paul wrote to husbands, “Love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (5:25), and “Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies” (5:28). Overarching the entire discussion is Paul’s

description of Spirit-filled men and women: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21).

10. Marriage is the foundation of the family, both in terms of procreation and nurture. Children, ideally, are born into an intact family with both father and mother present. These two parents are intended to be the first providers of their nurture. This order of family life may be observed throughout the Bible with particular emphases on childrearing drawn from such passages as Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Malachi 2:15, and Ephesians 6:1-4. The divine intention, however, has never guaranteed that sin will not fragment and distort many families that, in such cases, are not to be despised, diminished, or neglected, but are to be supported with wise counsel and loving fellowship.

The Nature of Divorce

1. God hates divorce. God's attitude toward divorce is nowhere stated more clearly than in Malachi 2:14-16:

...[T]he 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 your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 'I hate divorce,' says the Lord God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

This passage shows that divorce is treachery (deceitful unfaithfulness) against one's companion. It is also described as violent, coming from a wrong spirit. Perhaps worst of all, it impairs the nurture of children born to the marriage whom the parents are obligated to rear as believers in a godly home. Broken homes are most often detrimental to children.

As noted above, Jesus made explicit what was previously implicit, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6; cf. v.8). Divorce was not a part of God's original intention for humanity. His purposes in marriage are hindered when the marital covenant is deliberately broken. The divine purpose can only be realized as the husband and wife subject themselves to Christ and each other, as described in Ephesians 5:21-31.

God's hatred for divorce, however, is not to be interpreted as condemnation of those who themselves are not at fault, but have been divorced and victimized by the ungodly actions of their spouses. The divorce laws and teachings of the Old Testament were designed to add a measure of protection for the innocent, not to heap guilt upon the victims of circumstances over which they had little or no control.

2. The Law regulated divorce. The Law recognized the fact that divorce was already taking place in Israel, as were many other sinful practices common to the ancient world. In those times, women were under the authority of their husbands and, without legal recourse of their own, might be abandoned to starvation or prostitution on a mere whim. In giving Israel the Law, God met His people where they were in a pagan region, put restrictions on their sinful practices, protected the weak and innocent, and attempted to direct them in ways loving and just. The Old Testament divorce law was thus a necessary hedge against human sinfulness. The Law provided that, while the husband was the only one who could initiate divorce, he could do so only under carefully prescribed circumstances (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; cf. 22:13-19, 28,29; Genesis 21:8-21).

The regulative nature of the Law is seen in the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees who erred in saying Moses commanded that a man give a certificate of divorce to his wife, thus freeing him to send her away (Matthew 19:1-9). Jesus pointed out that Moses only permitted (epitrepo) them to divorce their wives—but even then not for “every cause” as was commonly practiced at the time (Matthew 19:3,7,8). Jesus accurately read the divorce provisions of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 where the Hebrew is a simple sequence that does not command divorce, but simply recognizes that it happens under certain circumstances.

3. Jesus forbade divorce as contrary to God's will and word. He made this clear in Matthew 19:5,6 and Mark 10:6-9, “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” The partner, or partners, responsible for breaking the marriage covenant is guilty of adultery (see Mark 10:11).

4. Paul forbade Christian couples to divorce. “To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord [Paul had an actual saying of Jesus to back this up]): 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” (1 Corinthians 7:10,11). Paul recognized that some Christians were getting divorces, but apparently for invalid reasons. Therefore, he commanded, in these cases, that they keep the way open for reconciliation.

5. Paul forbade Christians to take the initiative in divorce simply because their partner was an unbeliever. It appears that some new converts were eager to do exactly that.

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord) [Paul was indeed speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit; he merely refers to the fact that he has no actual saying of Jesus on this subject]: If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him [as a faithful wife], he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ... But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound [not enslaved] in such circumstances" (1 Corinthians 7:12-15, emphasis added).

While making every effort to preserve the marriage, when the unbelieving spouse was definitely unwilling to continue, the believer should not, at all costs, attempt to restrain him/her. In these cases, abandonment, by implication, may be interpreted as grounds for divorce and remarriage.

6. Jesus permitted a Christian to initiate a divorce when "marital unfaithfulness" was involved.

I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery (Matthew 5:32; see also Matthew 19:9).

The Greek word translated "marital unfaithfulness" in these passages is *porneia*, which would certainly include adultery in the context of these sayings (a *porne* was a prostitute). However, *porneia* is a broad term for sexual immorality of various kinds, often habitual, both before and after marriage (Mark 7:21; Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:18; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3). In stating the exception, Matthew did not use *moicheia*, the Greek noun for adultery. (Jesus did differentiate between *porneia* and *moicheia* elsewhere [Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21] and the verb *moicheuo* is used in Matthew 5:32; 19:9 to describe the actions of the sinful party who forces the divorce without a valid cause.)

Matthew used *porneia* in 5:32 and 19:9 to translate the Hebrew 'erwâ ("something indecent") found in Deuteronomy 24:1. It was this Old Testament passage that lay behind Jesus' teaching and his dispute with the Pharisees. The root meaning of 'erwâ has to do with "uncovering" and "exposure" of, among other things, the genitalia (Genesis 9:22,23). So the "indecent" of Deuteronomy 24:1 appears to have been some kind of sexual immorality, or indecency, short of adultery (for which the adulterer would have been stoned; cf. Deuteronomy 22:22). The broad semantic range of 'erwâ is

also characteristic of porneia; both words are general and appear purposefully to include a variety of immoral practices. For example, the Holiness Codes of Leviticus 18 condemned such sex acts as incest, adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality.

In Matthew 5:31,32 and 19:8,9, Jesus spoke of the man's initiative in divorcing an immoral partner. In Jewish society, normally, only the man had that legal right—though certain upper-class women, as Herodias, seem to have done so (Matthew 14:3; note that in Mark 10:11,12, Jesus warns both sexes against groundless divorces). Clearly, the spiritual principle applies for either men or women. Moreover, it should be noted that Jesus granted permission to divorce only under specific circumstances where sexual immorality was involved. He did not, however, issue a command to divorce, since such action would rule out any possibility of reconciliation.

To be sure, a few scholars, drawing from ancient church tradition, believe that divorce is always forbidden, even when the spouses of innocent believers are guilty of repeated sexual immorality. These scholars narrowly restrict Jesus' exception as stated in Matthew to rare, unlawful unions. In this view, there are no cases when, after dissolving these unlawful unions, remarriage is permitted. These innocent parties are not free to remarry until and unless the offending former spouse dies.

From another tack, many higher critical scholars insist that Matthew, in this case, put an exception in Jesus' mouth that He never really spoke. However, the exception clauses in Matthew are well supported in the earliest texts of the Gospel and these two occurrences (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) are to be regarded as dependable words of the Lord.

It is seldom, if ever, that any single passage gives all aspects of truth on any single theme. To come to an understanding of any truth, we must take the whole of what the Bible teaches, and that is the intent of this paper.

The Right To Remarry

1. The Law makes clear that divorce permitted remarriage. Deuteronomy 24:1-4, already quoted, assumed that the divorced woman (and her former husband) would remarry. However, this passage also shows that the Law put certain limits on remarriage in that the rejected wife could not be reclaimed after her marriage to another man.

2. Jesus taught that divorce and remarriage, without biblical cause, was adultery. It constituted a sin against the covenant of the first marriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11,12; Luke 16:18). In these passages, Jesus appears to be speaking to those who willfully initiated divorce without having biblical grounds to do so. However, Jesus

recognized that the basic problem is divorce itself, because divorced persons could be expected to remarry.

3. Jesus included an exception on behalf of the innocent spouse. "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness (porneia), causes her to become an adulteress" (Matthew 5:32; see also Matthew 19:9). This shows that a married person who divorces a sexually immoral spouse does not cause that spouse to commit adultery, since the offender is already guilty of adultery. Nor does the spouse who has been sinned against commit adultery upon remarriage. It should be noted, of course, that "marital unfaithfulness (porneia)" often implies repeated immorality so this exception should not be considered a command to end a viable, salvageable marriage marred by one tragic indiscretion.

4. Paul also included an exception on behalf of the innocent spouse. In cases where unbelieving spouses were unwilling to live with partners who had become believers, Paul advised, "If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound [not "enslaved," douloo] in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15). "Not bound" is a strong expression that appears to mean the believer is set free. Therefore, the meaning seems to be that the believer is free to remarry.

Paul, in some cases, does discourage remarriage for the sake of ministering to the Lord. "Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned" (1 Corinthians 7:27,28). All divorced persons considering remarriage should remember Paul's instructions to these unmarried virgins at Corinth, "but he [in this case, the new spouse] must belong to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39).

5. Objections to remarriage. The above exceptions notwithstanding, there are still certain arguments made against the remarriage of innocent believers.

a. It is sometimes recognized that Jesus' exceptions do indeed allow divorce for "marital uncleanness." But it is then argued that such a divorce still does not sever the marital bond, or give any right to dissolve it. Therefore, on this view, remarriage by the innocent party is still adultery. However, Jesus never made such a statement; and in Matthew 19:9, He assumes the man will remarry. The verse deals with divorce and remarriage; the laws of grammar make the exceptive clause apply to both. The Greek word for "divorce (apoluo)" is used in the Deuteronomy passage to which Jesus referred in Matthew 5:31 and Mark 10:2-12. In the Deuteronomy passage, the "divorcing" clearly dissolved the marriage bond. Jesus did not change the nature of

divorce as the dissolution of marriage. He simply threw out all excuses, reasons, or causes except "marital uncleanness(porneia)."

Moreover, this view is difficult to maintain in light of other passages that emphasize the conjugal rights and obligations of husbands and wives (as in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5). Most Protestants therefore have understood that the exceptions spoken by Jesus do indeed provide for remarriage and free the innocent party of any charge of adultery. But, in no case does Jesus command divorce or remarriage. They are merely permitted under this condition.

b. The objection sometimes is made that two passages, Romans 7:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39, specifically say a woman is bound to her husband until death; therefore, believers may not divorce or remarry short of the death of their spouse.

Romans 7:1-3—A careful examination of the context shows that Paul's point is to illustrate the believer's freedom from the Law. In ancient Judaism, only the husband could initiate divorce. Therefore, his wife was bound to him as long as she lived, unless, of course, he chose to divorce her. Paul's point is to show that the believer has died to the Law and is now alive to serve in the new way of the Spirit. The passage was not intended to address the problems of divorce and remarriage.

1 Corinthians 7:39—This verse appears to refer back to verses 8,9 which deal with those who have never married as well as with widows. So Paul is addressing widows whose husbands have passed away. The passage does not deal with the question of divorce and remarriage. Moreover, Paul has already addressed the problem of abandonment in verse 15 and shown that "A believing man or woman is not bound [that is, free to remarry] in such circumstances."

6. Remarriage establishes a new marriage covenant. While Scripture makes it clear that errant spouses who sinfully break their marriage covenant do commit adultery, Scripture never places such guilt on the innocent partner. Those who argue that an innocent believer continuously commits sin by living in a new marriage have not a single shred of biblical evidence. Jesus clearly assumed that those who were divorced by sinful spouses, or those who divorced sinful spouses for "marital uncleanness" or abandonment, were free to remarry without any tinge of adultery. However, believers are to remarry one who "belong[s] to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39) and the new marriage covenant is to be permanent.

The Divorced and Remarried in the Church

1. Membership in the church is open to all born-again believers. This would certainly include those who were divorced and remarried before conversion. Paul indicates that

persons in various social and legal positions, such as circumcised men and slaves, should be accepted in the condition in which they were when they were saved (1 Corinthians 7:17-24). "Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to" (1 Corinthians 7:24).

Huge numbers of Jews and Gentiles were swept into the Early Church. Given the frequency of divorce and remarriage among both Jews and Gentiles at that time, it is virtually certain that the early churches included many divorced and remarried persons. For example, Paul insisted that Corinthian believers continue to live with unbelieving partners willing to remain in their marriages (1 Corinthians 7:12). Probably many of these Corinthian believers had previous spouses still living and/or were married to unbelievers in those circumstances.

2. The office of elder is open to remarried persons who were divorced and remarried prior to conversion, or as a result of spousal infidelity, or desertion of a believer by an unbeliever. (Since local assemblies maintain the prerogative of setting their own standards for the office of deacon, that standard is not addressed in this paper [See Bylaws Article IX, Section 5, Divorce and Remarriage]).

Near the top of the list of requirements for the offices of elder (corresponding to pastor) is that they shall be "the husband of but one wife (mias gunaikos andra)" (1 Timothy 3:2; 3:12; Titus 1:6). "[H]usband of but one wife" reads literally "one woman man." Its exact meaning is elusive and has been subject to a number of interpretations over the years. Six are listed here. Taken literally, the term would mean that elders and deacons (1) could not be single, (2) could not remarry after being widowed, (3) must be male, and (4) could not be bigamists or polygamists. None of the first three can be shown to be the practice of the Early Church. Bigamy and polygamy are clearly prohibited by this term; however, historians report bigamy and polygamy were not common in either Jewish or Greco-Roman practice at the time and probably are not exactly what Paul had in mind.

Two possible interpretations remain: (5) elders and deacons cannot be divorced and remarried, a traditional and long-standing view of the Church, and (6) elders and deacons must be in a sexually faithful, heterosexual, monogamous marriage.

Sexual license (Acts 15:20; Romans 1:24; 1 Corinthians 6:9,18; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Revelation 2:21, et al.), easy divorce (1 Corinthians 7:12-16), and remarriage, often legally mandated, posed enormous challenges for the emerging Church and its thousands of converts. Nonetheless, these

new believers were affirmed as new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), forgiven of all their sins (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:19), and integrated into the Church.

In view of all the available biblical evidence relating to the divorce and remarriage problems in the Early Church, The General Council of the Assemblies of God has adopted interpretation six above—the description, “one woman man,” is best understood to refer to persons in a sexually faithful, heterosexual, monogamous marriage, where neither partner has been previously divorced (except where the divorce occurred prior to conversion, as a result of the previous spouse’s sexual infidelity, or because of abandonment of the believer by an unbeliever).

Application of Biblical Principles to Our Bylaws as Revised and Adopted by the General Council in Session

Article IX, Section 5. Divorce and Remarriage

a. Membership

(1) Marriage entanglements before conversion. There are now among Christian people those who became entangled in their marriage relations in their former lives of sin and who do not see how these matters can be adjusted. We recommend that these people be received into the membership of local assemblies and that their marriage complications be left in the hands of the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:17,20,24).

(2) Common-law marriages. We recommend that in no case shall persons be accepted into membership who are known to be living in a common-law state of matrimony.

b. Remarriage Low standards on marriage and divorce are very hurtful to individuals, to the family, and to the cause of Christ. Therefore, we discourage divorce by all lawful means and teaching. We positively disapprove of Christians getting divorces for any cause except fornication and adultery (Matthew 19:9). Where these exceptional circumstances exist or when a Christian has been divorced by an unbeliever, we recommend that the question of remarriage be resolved by the believer in the light of God’s Word (1 Corinthians 7:15,27,28).

c. Local Church Leadership

(1) Standard for offices of bishop, or elder, and deacon. Since the New Testament restricts divorced and remarried believers from the church offices of bishop, or elder, and deacon, we recommend that this standard be upheld by all our assemblies (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:12), except when the divorce occurred prior to conversion (2

Corinthians 5:17) or for the scriptural causes of a former spouse's marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:9), or the abandonment of the believer by the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:10-15). [Note—The foregoing causes of unfaithfulness or abandonment are also understood to be applicable after conversion.]

(2) Prerogative of local assemblies. It is understood that recommendations are not binding, but local assemblies shall maintain the prerogative of setting their own standards (in accord with provisions of Article XI of the Constitution).

d. Performing Marriage Ceremonies

(1) Ministerial guidelines. We discourage any Assemblies of God minister performing a marriage ceremony for anyone who has been divorced and whose former spouse is still living, unless the case is included in the exceptional circumstances described in Bylaws, Article IX, B, Section 5, paragraph b.

(2) Violation of conscience not required. We realize that the remarrying of such persons included in the exceptive circumstances in Bylaws, Article IX, B, Section 5, paragraph b, could violate the conscience of a minister; and if this should be the case, the minister should not be expected to perform such ceremonies.

(3) Same-sex ceremonies. No minister shall perform any type of marriage, cohabitation, or covenant ceremony for persons who are of the same sex. Such a ceremony would endorse homosexuality which is a sin and strictly forbidden in God's Word (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:9-11). Any minister of our Fellowship who performs a ceremony for these types of disapproved relations, unless innocently deceived into doing so, shall be dismissed from the Fellowship.

(4) Counsel. An Assemblies of God minister is urged to counsel applicants for marriage ceremonies with scriptural guidelines for Christian marriage prior to performing the ceremony. A minister may not perform ceremonies for persons who, in the minister's opinion, approach marriage without proper forethought, wisdom, and sobriety.

e. Ministerial Credentials We disapprove of any married minister of the Assemblies of God holding credentials if either minister or spouse has a former spouse living unless the divorce occurred prior to conversion or for the scriptural causes of a former spouse's marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:9), or the abandonment of the believer by the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:10-15). (See also Article VII, Section 2, paragraphs j and k.)

Article VII, Section 2

i. Marriage Status.

We disapprove of any married persons holding ministerial credentials with the Assemblies of

God if either marriage partner has a former spouse living, unless the divorce occurred prior to his

or her conversion or for the scriptural causes of a former spouse's marital unfaithfulness

(Matthew 19:9), or the abandonment of the believer by the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:10-15,

except as hereinafter provided.

j. Annulments, Marriage Dissolutions, and Divorces

The Executive Presbytery shall have the authority to determine whether an applicant qualifies for

an ecclesiastical annulment. In such cases there must be clear and satisfactory evidence of

deception, fraud, or other conditions which have a profound impact preventing the creation of a

valid marriage union, unknown at the time of marriage by the applicant. The Executive Presbytery shall have the authority to determine whether an applicant qualifies

regarding a

former marriage when the termination of that marriage is consistent with the scriptural position

of the Fellowship relating to the granting or holding of ministerial credentials; or if a former

marriage ended prior to conversion. In those cases involving preconversion divorce they shall be

decided on an individual basis just as those that deal with ecclesiastical annulments.

Appeals

from the decision of the Executive Presbytery may be made to the General Presbytery.

Pastoral Application

This brief study of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the Bible is intended to inform pastoral care and guidance for the people of God. It provides clear direction for many problems that confront modern believers. At the same time, the complexities of modern life are such that specific direction for every single issue that may emerge in the church or the community may not be found in Scripture. In such cases, wise, Spirit-

led counseling and support must come from responsible spiritual leaders. The following principles and recommendations are offered for consideration:

1. Regular, consistent instruction in the nature of marriage, its permanence and nurture, is essential for teens, young single adults, engaged couples about to be married, and married persons across the lifespan of their marriages.
2. The church must speak clearly not only to the God-ordained, permanent nature of marriage as an exclusive covenant between two heterosexual persons, but also against the evils and sufferings that come from divorce.
3. The immediate victims of divorce, spouses and children, who have been sinned against and deeply hurt, need and deserve special care within Christian congregations and from trained caregivers.
4. In addressing the ideal nature of marriage, the church must also recognize that among its most needy, and yet potentially most fruitful, congregants are many who are already divorced, possibly remarried, and who struggle with guilt and condemnation from earlier marital failure. It is imperative that the church demonstrate to them Christ's love and grace.
5. An uncompromising declaration of the sanctity of marriage must be articulated in ways that affirm and comfort the divorced and equip them to be successful in any new marriage that may have been, or will be, undertaken in faithfulness to Christ.
6. These divorced and remarried believers have great potential for service to the church and must not be viewed as second-class saints. Instead, they are to be instructed in the Spirit's work of preparation and gifting for service through their personal lives and marriages.
7. The church must also deal very purposefully and firmly with professing believers who willfully violate their marital vows and engage in behaviors that destroy their marriage covenants, often, at the same time, seeking justification for their behavior.
8. Special sensitivity will be needed for those caught in difficult marital circumstances not specifically addressed in Scripture such as physical and emotional abuse, as well as chemical addictions, where serious danger to life and limb, not to mention physical and spiritual health, prevails. Believers enmeshed in these circumstances are to be carefully led through the application of scriptural principles and prayer as they come to decisions consistent with Scripture and their own consciences.

9. In our congregations, cohabiting couples are occasionally among those who are converted, or restored to faith. Firm and sensitive pastoral guidance is needed to assist them in prayerfully reevaluating their relationship and moving either to separation and chastity or to legal marriage before becoming members or assuming leadership roles.

In all humility, the church today, as did the Early Church, struggles to understand and faithfully to apply the teachings of Scripture as it evangelizes and nurtures people in a secular, materialistic, and sensual environment. Realizing there is much we do not know about the ways Jesus and the Apostles would have handled every problem raised by divorce and remarriage, we of the Assemblies of God offer this paper in a sincere effort to affirm and practice the truth of Scripture while also endeavoring "to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).