

BETHEL POSITION PAPER

presented by
Study Committee
1994

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I. STATEMENT OF FAITH

The Triune God: We Believe in one God, eternally existing and manifest as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ: We believe in the Deity of Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth, born of the Virgin Mary, in His perfect humanity, His atoning death, through His shed blood, His bodily resurrection from the dead, and His personal triumphant return.

Life Beyond: We believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and our eternal destiny, in Heaven or Hell, determined by divine judgment, according to God's Holy Word.

Authority of the Bible: We believe in the divine inspiration and the infallibility of the entire Bible as the Word of God and the only authoritative and trustworthy guide of faith and practice.

Transforming Salvation By Grace: We believe a Christian is one saved by God's grace, through believing faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian life is transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ by His atoning death, and shed blood, the power of His resurrection.

Christian Discipline: With the teaching and example of our Lord, we believe in living a life of love and peace in our relationship to others, which includes forgiveness and a spirit of non-resistance. (Rom. 12:18NIV). "If it is possible as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." The Christian life will of necessity also express itself in non-conformity to the world in character and conduct. "Don't let the world around you, squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your minds from within." (Rom. 12:2 Phillips translation).

Prayer: We believe in prayer as having fellowship with God, a sincere desire to be open to God's divine will and power.

Church of Believers: We believe that Christ's Church, (the body of Christ), consists of believers who have repented from their sinful condition, who have accepted Christ by faith, and are sincerely endeavoring by the Grace of God to live the Christian life.

Christian Brotherhood: We believe in the brotherhood of the redeemed under the fatherhood of God in Christ.

II. MARRIAGE

1. Marriage is ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ and is to be honored by us. It should not be entered into lightly, and believers should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. (II Cor. 6:14).
2. Marriage is divinely designed and instituted by God as a lifelong relationship. (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; Eph. 5:31).
3. Marriage is the most intimate and meaningful of all human relationships. God created and sanctified marriage for our welfare and happiness. Also in God's plan singleness (unmarried), can be one of life's wholesome and satisfying experiences.
4. Marriage involves:
 - a. "Leaving" one's family and establishing a new home.
 - b. "Cleaving", that is, being permanently bound in a partnership as husband and wife.
 - c. "Becoming one flesh" physically through sexual union.
5. Marriage is built on a commitment by the bride and groom. It is a promise made before God, friends, and family members which one plans to keep for life with Gods help.
6. When serious misunderstanding and undue tension come into the marriage relationship, the couple should seek a wise Christian counselor or counselors to help restore a loving and forgiving relationship to the marriage.

III.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Introduction: Of all the social problems that confront the Church, none is more difficult than that of divorce and remarriage. It creates problems in the very depth of our personality and problems in society that reveal themselves in the action and attitudes of children who suffer the trauma of divorce.

It is for this reason that a presentation of the position of Bethel Mennonite Church is necessary. Simplistic statements and oblique references will no longer suffice. There is a need for a more comprehensive presentation on the fundamental issues of divorce and remarriage as we understand the teaching of Scripture.

A. FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS

We, the members of Bethel Church, believe that there are five statements on the issues of divorce and remarriage that rightfully fall into the category of foundational truths. We believe that these are Scriptural truths in which there is nearly universal agreement. All of the membership should subscribe to these foundational truths.

1. God's design is that Marriage is a permanent union.

When God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:22-25), He had a design, an ideal in mind. That design is that man and woman form an indissoluble bond. He commands such marriage partners to "cleve together" and enjoy a "one flesh" relationship. Because that command is repeated again by Christ in the New Testament (Matt. 19:5; Mk. 10:7-8), we believe that God's design for marriage remains unchanged. He desires that one man and one woman be united together for life.

2. Divorce is contrary to God's design.

Since God's design originally was that marriage be a permanent union between a man and a woman, then divorce, which represents a break in the relationship, is necessarily contrary to God's design. It is apparent that man instituted divorce, and that God chose to regulate it in order

to protect defenseless parties (Deut. 24:1-4), but He never condoned the practice for His people. In its very nature, divorce is contrary to God's design and a sinful result of man's hardness of heart. (Mk. 10:5).

3. God's grace is sufficient to meet all needs, regardless of one's state.

God desires obedience from His children. He also supplies enabling grace to each person who truly desires to walk in that obedience. Nothing is too difficult for Him (Jer. 32:16-27), and through His enabling strength, the believer is able to do all things required for obedience (Phil. 4:13). Therefore, a walk of obedience is possible for every believer regardless of marital state. By depending upon God to supply their needs, they are able to walk obediently.

4. Reconciliation should always be the goal in cases of marital conflict.

Because we retain a sinful nature after regeneration, marital conflict can and does appear. In certain instances physical separation is necessary for physical preservation. In nearly all cases there is some element of emotional and spiritual separation. We believe that God's design of permanency in marriage requires that reconciliation always be the goal in instances of marital conflict. (I Cor. 7:11). This would not support permanent physical separation and would encourage the introduction of a reconciling agents, such as a Christian counselor.

5. Remarriage is permissible in the event of the death of a former spouse.

Scripture clearly indicates that the marriage bond between a husband and wife is broken when one of the partners dies. (Rom. 7:1-3; I Cor. 7:39-40). With the dissolution of the marriage bond, the freedom to be remarried follows. Therefore, we believe it is right and Biblical to allow spouses who have lost their partners in death to be remarried. We also believe that this freedom applies to divorcees who have remained unmarried until the death of their former partner. In either case, when the spouse dies, the marriage bond is broken and the remaining partner is free to remarry.

B. DIVORCE

We believe that marriage is designed by God to be permanent. Broken marriages are not God's will. (Matt. 19:6, Mk. 10:6-9, Rom. 7:1-3, Mal. 2:16). Divorce represents one of the greatest failures in human life, and therefore one of its greatest heartbreaks. For these reasons, God hates divorce. It creates deep personal wounds, twists the attitudes and actions of the children involved and surfaces in many societal problems. We strongly oppose the idea that divorce is a solution to marital discord or unhappiness. Jesus taught that in God's plan, marriage is meant for life.

Yet, every marriage will at times be more of an ordeal than a love affair. The degree of mutual commitment to obeying God, and the confrontation of each partner's problems in these difficult times is what ultimately builds or destroys a marriage. Some marriages do fail, and we believe that we must help care for these persons and their children. We hold that it is important not to become so caught up in expounding the Biblical teaching on divorce (e.g. when it is permissible and when it is not), that we fail to show compassion for the individuals involved.

We believe that the Church should be an agent for healing and help in the midst of the tragedy of divorce, while still maintaining a high view of the marriage.

C. REMARRIAGE

The issue of remarriage after divorce presents even more disagreement. We recognize that there do exist various biblically defensive views that are held by respected scholars. We hold the following position on remarriage that our Church takes as a matter of policy and practice.

We believe there are three sets of circumstances under which remarriage appears to be scripturally justified:

1. When divorce occurred, (regardless of circumstances) before salvation. God's promise in II Corinthians 5:17 applies to divorce as well as to sins committed in the believer's past. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." (I Cor. 5:17).

2. When one's mate is guilty of sexual immorality and is unwilling to repent and live faithfully with the marriage partner. In Matthew 19:9 Jesus says, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." We must evaluate each case independently, bearing in mind that "immorality" here refers to unrepentant behavior, and that divorce and remarriage is only an **option** for the faithful partner — not a command.

3. When an unbelieving mate willfully and permanently deserts a believing partner. Note I Corinthians 7:15, "If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace." This does not refer to a temporary departure, but to a more permanent abandonment, where there is little or no hope of reviving former commitments and saving the relationship.

Therefore, anyone who has become a Christian after divorce and/or remarriage will be welcomed into membership. However, anyone wishing to become a member who has been divorced and/or remarried after becoming a Christian, will be asked to counsel with the Church board regarding their specific situation before membership may be granted. Each situation will be dealt with on an individual basis at the discretion of the Church board. Since we believe that marriage is a permanent relationship, it is our duty to encourage that. We believe that God forgives and loves people who have been divorced. Whom God has forgiven after sincere repentance, the Church should also graciously forgive.

IV. SANCTITY OF LIFE

A. Abortion and Euthanasia

The following statement: “Affirming the Sanctity of Life in Relation to Abortion and Euthanasia”, we believe to be excellent points on this topic:

1. We accept the Bible as the written form of God’s revelation to us and the ultimate guide for faith and practice.
2. We understand the Bible to teach that people are created in the image of God, and that all human life is sacred. (Gen. 1:26-27, Jer. 1:5).
3. We believe that abortion and euthanasia are sinful because they violate the sanctity and value of human life. (Ps. 139:13-16).
4. We urge members and institutions to offer alternatives to abortion and euthanasia, such as counseling resources, adoption, and economic assistance.
5. We appeal for understanding of those who are confronted with hard decisions, and for a spirit of sensitivity and Christian love.

V. HUMAN SEXUALITY

We affirm that sexuality is a good and beautiful gift of God, a gift of identity and a way of being in the world as male and female. We affirm that we can feel positive about our bodies and our sexuality because we know our Creator. We affirm that sexual drive is not the chief good in life. We affirm both the goodness of singleness and the goodness of marriage and family in the Lord. (I Cor. 6:18-20 NIV).

“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually, sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, whom is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.” (I Cor. 6:18-20 NIV).

1. We understand the Bible to teach that sexual intercourse is reserved for a man and woman united in marriage, and that violation of this teaching is sin. We further understand the Bible to teach the sanctity of the marriage covenant and that any violation of this covenant, including spouse abuse, is sin. We encourage compassion and prayer that distrustful, broken and sinful relationships may experience forgiveness and God’s healing as there is repentance.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:27 NIV).

“The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Gen. 2:18 NIV).

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24 NIV).

2. It is our understanding that this teaching also excludes premarital, extramarital, and homosexual sexual activity.

“Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” (Hebrews 13:4)

“If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.” (Leviticus 20:13; also Romans 1:26-27 and I Cor. 6:9)

3. We further understand the Bible to teach the sanctity of the marriage covenant and that any violation of this covenant including physical or emotional abuse is sin.

VI. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

(Bethel Mennonite Church Constitution)

Church discipline is always to be redemptive, a means of grace, not of punishment; an act of love, not of resentment. (II Thess. 3:14-15). The purpose of church discipline is to restore the one who is in error.

Should a member bring reproach upon the name of Christ and the church by reason of un-Christian conduct as outlined in I Cor. 6:9, 16 and in Gal. 5:18-21, faithful efforts shall be made by the Church board to bring such a person or persons to repentance and amendment. If these fail, the council may suspend such a member, and the Church may, after due notice and hearing, terminate such membership.

Should any unhappy difference arise between members, the aggrieved member shall follow in the spirit of Christ the rules given him in Matt. 18:15-17 and in I Cor. 6:1-8.

Any member whose membership has been terminated may be restored by vote of the Church at any time the evidence makes such desirable.

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