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The UK International Conference Policy on
Divorce and Remarriage
The Family in Crisis
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- Marriage is a binding agreement between a man and woman to love and cherish as long as they both shall live. During the later half of the twentieth century, the sacredness of the marriage vows has reduced greatly in alarming numbers. Statistics reveal that half of all marriages end up in court. Divorce is on the rampage as an acceptable solution to troubled relationships. In addition, we live in a secular culture, postmodern age where marriage is on the attack; this means that the very bedrock upon which nation building and family building have been challenged.
- Before the incarnation of Jesus, (His birth and coming into the word) during what is called the intersimental period (the gap period between Malachi and the book of Matthew) a Rabbi by the name of Rabbi Haillel (70 BC -A.D. 10) was a prominent leader among the Jews of Palestine. He was born in Babylonia and established a school, which was called by his name, in Jerusalem. He arranged under six topics the many rules that had developed among the Jews pertaining to the 613 commands in the Mosaic Law.
- Shammai, a contemporary (living at the same time as the other) of Hillel, differed from Hillel in both personality and hermeneutics. (the ability to

interpret the law through this method). A man with a violent temper, he interpreted the law rigidly and the teaching of these two rabbis often directly conflicted with each other. After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the school of Hillel became more prominent, and the School of Shammi receded in significance and influence

- Among Pharisees and Sadducees in Jesus' day were the two main groups that discussed the legal implications of God's law for marriage and divorce. "The House of Shammai say, ' A man should divorce his wife only because he has found grounds for unchastely, since it is said 'because he has found in her indecency in anything" (Deut 24:1) The House of Hillel says, 'Because he has found in her indecency in anything.' R. Aquiba who is also from the Hillel school further added and said 'Even if he found someone else prettier than she" since it is said, 'And it shall be if she find favour in his eyes' (Deut 24:1)" (Mishnah, *Gittin* 9:10).
- Jesus' own teachings are similar to the House of Shammi since both reject divorce except for adultery. An underling assumption shared by all three views is that the husband is able to incite divorce. At the time of Jesus, the religious leaders (Hillel and Shammai) disagreed in their interpretations of the law of divorce. Followers of Hillel believed divorce could be for any reason. Followers of Shammai believed that the only excuse was adultery. What did Jesus say about the issue? According to Mark (but not the other Gospels), marriage is **monogamous** between a man and a woman. In John 4, Jesus met a woman who had "five husbands." The grounds for her divorce may have been trivial, but Jesus does not judge her as to her sinfulness. In another story (John 7:53-8:11) here Jesus is being trivial; Jesus does not judge her

for her sinfulness in terms of the subject of adultery. In another story (John 7:53-8:11) where Jesus meets a woman caught in adultery-a different issue- he stops the accusers, show her grace, and says "Has no one condemned you... then neither do I..."

- Note: **Hillel** and **Shammai** were Pharisaic Leaders of different segments of the Jewish people. **Hillel** would be more radical than the **Shammai**.
- According to Mark's report, though a man or a woman may have gone through a legal divorce, but in the eyes of Jesus and God, he or she cannot remarry. This passage does not speak of **sinning through divorce but in remarriage**. If Christians today had only Mark's Gospel, the conclusion would be that remarriage is not permitted under any circumstances. However, the Gospel of Matthew further expands on this issue and makes an exception for remarriage **because of fornication**.
- The exception here is clear, "except it be for the cause of fornication." Fornication is translated from the Greek word *porneia*, which suggests illicit sex and uncleanness behaviour (immorality). Notable among these are premarital unchastely, adultery, incest, harlotry, prostitution of the flesh whether for pay or not for pay etc. It may refer to marriages within the degrees prohibited by the Law of Moses and generally to all such intercourse as prohibited by the law. (Lev 18: 20:10).
- What would be the church position on immoral conduct today? The following pointers are worth considering: - (1) Homosexual behaviour perpetuated by both parties of the same gender. (2) Those that undergo abusive situations in which the lives of the weaker vessel (woman, in this case) are put in danger as well as the children. (3) Physical/psychological and verbal abuses by both partners. (4) Paramours, (a male Prostitute),

(5) Catamites, (male who is used for unnatural purposes). Which of these do you think would warrant divorce and why?

- My answer to this is if any of the above numbered 1-5 is committed then there is just cause for divorce. Bearing in mind when Jesus was asked the question in Matthew 19 1-12 “is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause” and the answer Jesus gave them in verse 9 was “I say unto you whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication and shall marry another commits adultery”. Jesus did not make it very clear in this Scripture whether one should or should not remarry after divorce. However, in my interpretation of the text I put it to you that if any immoral act as stated above are committed and divorce takes place that person who is the innocent party can remarry. **The previous marriage contract is broken and the innocent party may remarry.** This is an exceptional case and it must be merited as such.
- Notwithstanding the above if, any married believers commits any of the acts above and are prepared to remain together under the order of forgiveness- as the Scripture states we should forgive one another - this decision rests wholly and solely with the individuals.
- The Scriptures and the church strongly recommend that couples should not be quick to separate from one another and it ends up in the divorce courts. All agencies must be use such as prayer and fasting, counselling, etc to endeavour to assist couples to forgive and to be able to reconcile the indifferences in their marriages/relationships. The Apostle Paul confirms in 1Cor 7:11 that reconciliation is paramount in marriage disputes. If separation occurs for **other reasons** than that mentioned in Matt 19: 1 -12 (note verse 9) then those who are separated and sometimes divorced shall have to remain unmarried. If any of the

married parties remarries, they will be in an adulterous relationship and the Scripture condemns such actions.

- In the case of the unbelieving and the believer, such law is not binding, and the believer is not held under such law. Let me explain further- both mates in a marriage are unbelievers upon marrying, sometime later in life, one of the mates become a believer; sometimes the unbelieving mate is willing to remain in the marriage, in spite of their differences and goals. Sometimes, the unbeliever has no use for their mates' faith and wants out of the marriage. Paul gives instructions in 1Cor 6:15 "Yet, if the unbelievers want a separation, let him (or her) separate. A brother or sister is not enslaved in such case."
- In this portion of scripture, Paul writes of "enslavement". It appears that Paul is not just thinking of responsibility of the marriage to one another. He speaks of the law of marriage in Romans 7:23-4; and 1 Cor 7:39; and 1 Cor 6:10-17; He states that the husband and wife are both bound or "enslaved" to the marriage vows until death takes one of them. In the fifteenth verse, Paul is saying that if the unbelieving mate cannot tolerate the newfound faith and salvation of their mate; and because of that mates' love for the Lord, he or she is no longer enslaved to that one in the law of marriage. Paul tells the believing spouse to "Let them go". This is the only case, where the unbeliever leaves only because of the spouses' conversion; the believer is free to marry another. Enslavement to each other, and enslavement to God's law of marriage, enslaved not to break this law, but enslaved to carry out their responsibilities to each other.
- What do we make of this situation – primarily it is the church position to take a direct stand for the union of marriage and family building,

between consenting heterosexuals, and this as a church we defend rigorously. However, in saying this, we note that there has been a steady rise in marital infidelity in the church. How will the church address this situation without causing an offense? The church will have to explain correctly the exegesis (interpret/explanation) of the written scriptural text in order for Christians to understand what the text is saying to them. As I have stated in this document that when any Christian person commits adultery/fornication (**porneia**) then there is cause for **divorce** and **remarry** if the married parties chose to do so. If they decided to forgive each other then it is the best thing for the family in crisis.

- Divorce is one of the most traumatic experiences a person undergoes in life. The emotional strain of a broken relationship and the public humiliation of divorce may perpetuate a dark cloud over a person's life. Instead of rejection, hurting individuals need the comfort of friends and the understanding that comes through the love of Christ. Expressing love and mercy during divorce is more important than pronouncing condemnation and treating people like second-class citizens of the Body of Christ. God's mercy can bring restoration to families in crisis.
- Let me say that it is not the intention of the Mount Zion 7th Day Church of God UK International Conference to advocate in this document that married couples can **divorce** and **remarry** for any reasons i.e one of the parties fall out of love with their spouse, financial problem, inter-relation family problems, educational problems and the list could go on and on. What this document is stating here is that there are reasons for divorce and remarry as explained in the document.
- If any member of the body of Christ comes to the Conference and tells me that, they are a divorcee and they want to get married, again I would have to carry out a thorough investigation in order to ensure that there

are satisfactory grounds (just cause) for a remarriage. I would need to establish who the innocent party is before I would carry out such a ceremony.

- The following scriptures must be read in conjunction with the above:
 1. Romans 7:1-3
 2. 1 Corinthians 7:39
 3. Matthew 5:27 - 32
 4. Matthew 19: 1-12

Conclusion

- Relationships and family life are important to God. Love is a gift that preserves our precious families and can never be expressed enough. Never be afraid to say, "*I Love you!*"

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Revised and co edited by Dr Samuels BD BA (Hon) MA PHD, PCGE January for
2011*