

## Statement on Divorce and Remarriage

*Spiritual Council of Immanuel Leidy's Church*

It is clear that God does not approve or prescribe or advise of divorce in any given situation. In fact, God's attitude is clearly revealed in Malachi 2:16 where God states, "I hate divorce." Divorce necessarily includes the breaking of covenantal vows made between the married persons; the breaking of such vows made before the Lord is an extremely serious offense. Additionally, persons close to those involved in a divorce are impacted negatively, including children, parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, etc. The overall impact on the community at large is to lend legitimacy to an action God hates.

The teaching of the Bible does permit [*not demand or encourage!*] divorce in two different scenarios. First, in Matthew 19:9 Jesus indicates that an exception may be made wherein divorce would be *permitted* if the situation is one of "immorality." The Greek word used is πορνεία (por-nay-ah) from which we get our word "pornography," for instance. The word does not mean merely *adultery* [μοιχεία] or *fornication* [πόρνος], but rather sexual uncleanness. It is our view that πορνεία, in this instance, covers those instances of sexual immorality such as are enumerated in Leviticus 20:10-16 which carry a penalty of capital punishment. [Adultery is among those enumerated items, by the way, as well as some forms of fornication.] Thus, bestiality, which is not mentioned in the New Testament, is clearly condemned in Leviticus 20. If someone is placed in a situation where one's spouse is engaged in such behavior, then repentance and forgiveness ought to be encouraged as much as possible. However, should the guilty spouse be recalcitrant, or, the innocent spouse be unwilling to receive back the guilty spouse, it is *permitted, not prescribed*, for the innocent party to seek a divorce. When such divorce is granted, with the grounds clearly stated, then the innocent party is free to be remarried, though only in the Lord, that is, with another eligible believer. [1 Corinthians 7:39] With regard to the guilty party, this is addressed at length later in this paper.

The second scenario where divorce is *permitted though not prescribed* is documented in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16. This scenario concerns a marriage involving a Christian and a non-Christian. In the best of circumstances both were unbelievers at the time of their marriage (since God commands Christians not to marry non-Christians [2 Corinthians 6:14]) with one of the spouses subsequently being converted. So long as the unbelieving spouse is willing to continue in the marriage, the believing spouse is to stay and do the very best to maintain the marriage. However, "if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave." [1 Corinthians 7:15] In other words, the believing spouse

should do everything possible to make the marriage work and only give up if the unbelieving spouse insists on leaving. Additionally, it is assumed that the same exception applies in this situation concerning sexual immorality as explained above even though both spouses are not necessarily Christians.

We also find that God speaks to the situation where two believing spouses simply cannot live together. In such instances separation is an option, though not a preferred one. Such a separation entails that each spouse remain unmarried and, thus, sexually chaste. Documentation may be found in 1 Corinthians 7:10,11.

With regard to those who have violated God's command in the areas of marriage or divorce or remarriage something also must be said. It is the opinion of the Spiritual Council that such sins, while grievous, are not unpardonable. In such situations the most desired outcome would be for genuine repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. How that is to be achieved is much more problematic, yet those three elements are fundamental. Here is how we propose to apply them in situations where we are the responsible spiritual authority.

**Repentance** is a gift of the Holy Spirit and must first be directed to God. Then, it must be lived out in the daily actions by which one repudiates previous sinful behavior and purposes to walk according to biblical standards. On the human level repentance also must be given proper expression through confession to the appropriate persons. Such persons may include the offended spouse, the spouse of the other guilty person, the family members of each family as necessary, and to the Spiritual Council of Leidy's Church and any other Christian disciplinary board as appropriate. The Pastor and the Spiritual Council will work with the individuals involved to determine those to whom confession should be made. There will be times when it is appropriate for public confession in a service of worship to take place, though in normal circumstances such would not be the case.

**Forgiveness** comes through the mercies of the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the One who can cleanse the human soul and render one forgiven. Nonetheless, human forgiveness is also vital. Where any of the offended parties are members of Leidy's Church, the Pastor and the Spiritual Council will encourage biblical forgiveness to be practiced and seek to facilitate the same. The Spiritual Council will itself give formal expression to forgiveness when such forgiveness is sought and warranted by the erring church member. When deemed appropriate, such forgiveness will be given voice in the course of a service of worship.

**Restoration** is also a wonderful work of God. It is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth and brings us back into the condition of fruitful members of Christ's body. Yet, there is a human level for restoration as well. In some instances this will happen through renewal of covenantal marriage vows previously broken. Other instances will not permit of that because of remarriages already in place.

When remarriages have taken place that are not in accord with biblical teaching, this same process of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration is to be sought and followed. This does not mean a new divorce, but the contrite confession of non-biblical origins for the marriage and a seeking of God's forgiveness for the same. We understand the teaching of Matt. 18:18 and question 85 of the Heidelberg Catechism to delegate to the Spiritual Council the authority to pronounce forgiveness in Jesus' name. When all appropriate conditions are met, the Spiritual Council will restore the erring member to full communicative fellowship in the membership of Immanuel Leidy's Church. Such restoration shall occur at a meeting of the full Spiritual Council, or, in appropriate circumstances, during a service of worship.

In the context of practical application of this statement, the Spiritual Council has discovered that church membership is a very important matter. Without formal church membership there is no legitimate spiritual accountability and one cannot be made to face one's errors. What this means is that persons outside of church membership are living without any spiritual covering or protection, without anyone to speak authoritatively in Jesus' name and bring a demand for correction of behavior or belief, such demand being the voice of God's love calling one back from the precipice of spiritual destruction. Hence it follows that we shall place due emphasis on church membership and the faithful role of Elders who will speak the truth in love and hold those under our care to full biblical responsibility. [Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3] Ultimately those who have no authentic spiritual authority over them can only be treated as those who are outside the care and jurisdiction of the Church and, thus, of Christ.

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