

the letter. I decided that the Adventist church was stuck with me. I would always be an Adventist. I would stick it out.

Up to this time, I still had never had any sexual experience with anyone, male or female. I decided, here I am, unemployable, it's time I find out for sure. By accident I found where gays in my town meet at night. I went there three weeks in a row, every day, meeting people, and I finally met a person I felt really comfortable with.

Later on, I came out to my parents. In the first initial shock they were very supportive. After about a week, they got to thinking about it and decided, "You know, this is something that should be prayed about." So they requested that the pastor make an announcement in church. As a result, I came out to the entire church and they have been very supportive. . . .

**Speaker Ten:** . . . About a year-and-a-half ago I finally came to complete emotional breakdown and I admitted to my wife and to my pastor that I knew that I was gay. Well, the first response was "You go home and pray about it," which I knew wasn't going to help. I'd been doing that forever. And then he handed me a whole bunch of books of the sort that were supposed to deal with problems in marriage. It had nothing to do with me and my problem. And within a week I found out that he had announced it to the whole church. He had also called my children and announced it to them. Well, I lived through that, and then they asked me to go see a psychologist, which I did—an Adventist psychologist. A dear lady, I must say. She at least helped me in some respects to regain my personhood, although she didn't know anything about homosexuals. After five months of weekly 10-hour trips to go through this, and it wasn't doing much good, I finally had to tell my wife

and my pastor I could not go back to living a lie. I couldn't do it conscientiously.

This time my wife and my pastor—I live in a very small community of about 5,000 people, very red-necked—went to every business in the community informing them of what I was. I lost half my customers, and for the next three months I got phone calls and letters threatening my life. Three times shots have been fired through the windshield of my car as I drove along. I've had no more

communication with the church, except for the pastor one time coming to say he felt that he'd made a mistake. I've continued to attend church. Only two people from church have spoken to me in over a year. One of those dear ladies, a church board member, called last week to tell me that my name was being removed from the books. They have never contacted me about it. More recently, three elders of the church visited me and asked me to stay away from church altogether.

## What Does the New Testament Say About Divorce?



by John C. Brunt  
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Undoubtedly this brief survey of the New Testament material on divorce is complex and confusing. What does it all mean for our attitude toward divorce and our actions with regard to it? I tentatively set forth the following conclusions.

First, no "divorce policy" for the church can be attained from the New Testament material. Never does the New Testament explicitly connect divorce with church discipline. The New Testament writers did not intend to set down a church policy; rather they related Jesus' teachings to various situations that their communities faced. As a result there is some degree of diversity of detail among the New Testament writers, which makes harmonization into a single "biblical" policy impossible. In addition, the interpretive problems in these passages are too great to permit us to draw a detailed policy from them. There is simply too much that we don't know. For example, we cannot be absolutely certain whether Paul allows for remarriage after the divorce he permits, or precisely what *porneia* means in Matthew. If we

were to have a precise biblical policy, we would certainly need to have definite answers to both of these questions. This is not to say that the church should have no policy, nor is it to say that it cannot be informed by the New Testament. But when we formulate a policy we will have to accept responsibility for its content. We cannot simply call it the biblical policy.

Second, although the material does not provide us with a policy, it is useful for us. It not only sets forth some things that are quite clear, in spite of interpretive difficulties, but also gives us examples of inspired, moral reasoning in relationship to the divorce issue. Close attention to the material is therefore helpful in allowing us as individuals and as a church to reflect on this issue. We need not despair simply because there are difficult elements in the text. We can concentrate on what *is* clear. The recognition that we cannot draw clear-cut policies from the material does not render it irrelevant.

Third, the New Testament presents a consistent and clear presumption against divorce. All of the New Testament writers agree that Jesus opposed divorce and that God's ideal is that there should be no divorce. God intends that marriage should be permanent. He himself joins husbands and wives together, and humans are called upon to preserve his work and not undo it. This is the basic core of Jesus' teaching on divorce. Divorce thwarts God's will and misses his ideal.

This is by far the most important conclusion of the New Testament material on divorce, and it flies in the face of much of our contemporary culture. In an age when "till death do us part" all too often means "as long as everything goes well," the New Testament challenges us with God's will from creation for the permanence of

marriage. Every attempt on our part to look for grounds that we might use to justify divorce misses the point. The goal is no divorce. When we truly listen to the New Testament, we are responsible to do everything we can to reach that goal.

Fourth, in the New Testament, particularly in Paul and Matthew, there is a realization that in a less than ideal world humans will not always meet God's ideal. In fact, at times this ideal may conflict with other values and ideals, such as the ideal that God has called us to peace. The New Testament expresses a gracious realism that attempts to relate God's will to actual circumstances that are sometimes less than ideal. This is most apparent in Paul.

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Roy Branson (30)

Molleurus Couperus (17)

Tom Dybdahl (17)

Herold Weiss (14)

Ronald Graybill (13)

Gary Land (13)

Raymond F. Cottrell (10)

Fritz Guy (10)

Charles Scriven (10)

Jonathan Butler (9)

Paul's exception in the case of mixed marriages is based on a principle—God has called us to peace. This would seem to imply that Paul believes that other values, in addition to God's ideal for the permanence of marriage, are important and must, in at least some cases, be considered. As Furnish says of Paul:

He would appear to be unwilling to sanction the idea that marriage is an end in and of itself that must be maintained at any cost. Here Paul shows a sensitivity to the *quality* of a marriage relationship, for which he is seldom given credit.

Thus Paul presents us with an inspired example of principled, moral reasoning in relationship to a specific marital situation. Rather than legalistically making Paul's (or Matthew's for that matter) specific exception the only possible exception, it would seem more in keeping with the spirit of the New Testament material to engage in the same type of moral reasoning with regard to specific cases, asking, for example, what would be most in keeping with God's ideal for marriage and his call to peace, and recognizing that the strong presumption against divorce would make any exception bear a very strong burden of proof.

Fifth, although no policy can claim to be the biblical policy, certain requirements would seem necessary for any church to be able to claim that its decisions concerning divorce were consistent with the New Testament. What would such a policy need to do?

It would affirm and give witness to God's ideal that marriages are to be permanent. Anything less would dilute the clear and consistent teaching of the New Testament.

It would also attempt to mediate God's redemptive grace and heal-

ing in those situations where this ideal is not met. This would include the same gracious realism found in the New Testament.

It would be sufficiently flexible to allow for principled moral reasoning, such as we find in Paul, to be applied to specific cases. All too often, in an attempt to be consistent, the Matthean exception has been absolutized into a hard-and-fast law, with little if any reference to the Pauline approach. While this may satisfy our need to have cut-and-dried answers for

every situation, it loses the richness of the New Testament's moral thinking.

These criteria do not establish a policy but they do aid in evaluating any policy's consistency with the New Testament.

Finally, the affirmation of God's ideal for marriages must be seen not only in the church's divorce policy but in its total ministry. Even more important than how we treat cases of divorce and remarriage is what we do to promote good marriages and help troubled ones. . . .

## Camp Meeting Adventist Style: Soquel Through a Glass Darkly



by Jan Daffern

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The camp meeting I remember best, the camp meeting of my youth, is held each year in Soquel, a tiny coastal town in Central California. Soquel is a faded and drab town in an area of spectacular beauty. The most notable aspect of

Soquel is the light. Filtered through a gray mist, it makes lettuce grow in Salinas and illumines a whole genre of literature in and around Monterey. In Soquel, this fragile light is nearly suffocated by the yellow dust which sifts down from the hillsides and settles in the eucalyptus groves. Each August somewhere around 15,000 Adventists enter this suffusion of light and dust.

In those early years I went to Soquel only on Sabbaths. One of those years I went with my stepsister Sally [names have been changed], who did not attend church but never missed Soquel. We arrived in her 1968, metal-flake-blue Corvette. As we walked through the campground that day, Sally commented that all that was missing was a rock band like, say, Country Joe and the Fish, set up near the vegeburger stand. Although their music would have fit the scene, years later it occurred to me how utterly out of place the Fish would have been: none of them had ever attended academy with anyone I knew.

It has been estimated that a quarter of us who gathered there in

the late 60s and the early 70s were the products of the baby boom of California Adventism. Superficially we were indistinguishable from others of our time and place. As a group we participated in the restlessness of our generation and our presence resulted in the temporary doubling of the Soquel police force. We got high, celebrated free love, and as the era mellowed, turned on to Jesus and self-help. The recollection which burns through the swirl of those events is that rarely did any of us ever do these things with anyone who had not gone to academy at Fresno, or Glendale, or Rio Lindo. That we were so thoroughly immersed in the turbulence of that time only with each other, and most deeply at camp meeting, reveals a sincere obedience to sectarian Adventism.

Physically, the camp at Soquel offers the appearance of a combination parking lot and tented desert. On one end, the camp meeting tents stand in perfectly pitched rows, the remains of a time when the pious of the frontier abandoned the comforts of home for a season of spiritual refreshing. At Soquel in my teen years, the tents were giving way to recreational vehicles. These were parked in the southwest end and came complete with showers, toilets, and even color television. I can recall entering a 40-foot recreational vehicle meticulously decorated in white French provincial with accents in blue. The lady of the mobile home greeted me in a baby blue dressing gown and gold slippers.

In 1970 I made the transition from weekend visitor at Soquel to a resident for the full 10 days. I stayed in a camp meeting tent with my best friend Betsy and her family. Betsy and I walked through a cold fog at dawn to the youth tent to hear Morris Venden present the precise parsing of the phrase, "a total submission to Christ." There