

## A LETTER TO PASTORS & DELEGATES OF THE 2007 AOG CONFERENCE

Greetings. Most of you are aware that I am the former president of the AOG movement; an office which I held for 20 years. I still enjoy the privilege of ministering at different forums throughout the country. My reason for contacting you is to put forward a scriptural personal opinion concerning the documents (relating to constitutional changes) which you have received for ratification at the forthcoming National Conference.

Formerly my points of view could have been discussed on the conference floor, but on this occasion there is to be no discussion and a secret ballot. Hence I put forward my opinions in this letter by conference privilege and without malice.

To preface my points of view I want it known that I hold in great respect the current president, Pastor Brian Houston, and recognize the outstanding leader that he is and his amazing contribution to our movement. I also recognize the very talented Executive team. I honor them and live in Scriptural submission to their leadership.

I am aware that the constitutional changes have had discussion at only area levels, which means that I personally have only heard, and been heard by 10% and have not been privy to the opinions of 90 % of the pastors of our movement. This letter is to speak with all of you.

I will firstly discuss:-

### **"Code of Conduct"**

Although I congratulate the Executive for the excellent work done on the document concerning "Code of Conduct", I refer to an amendment submitted by Pastor John Lewis (former Vice President) and myself. I would have liked this submitted amendment to be debated by the full conference. This amendment was as follows:

*"In view of the social damage that alcohol has caused in this nation we encourage AOG Pastors, in accordance with Rom. 14: 2-19, 1 Cor.10:31-33 not to be a stumbling block to others and therefore abstain.*

*In cases where a Pastor chooses to consume alcohol, and drunkenness is proven, that Pastor's credentials shall be suspended for a period of 12 months."*

Behind this amendment lies the issue that ministers as community leaders need to be exemplary and avoid this drug which has a devastating cost to our society. Consider these statistics taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics report "Alcohol and Consumption in Australia -A Snapshot, 2004-05":

- High risk consumption of alcohol is strongly associated with oral, throat and esophageal and liver cancer.
- Drinking alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer among females.
- Children have a greater vulnerability to alcohol than adults; as well as being physically smaller; they lack experience of drinking and its effects.

- Young people when drinking are more likely to indulge in risky behaviour such as swimming, driving, unsafe or unwanted sex, verbal or physical abuse.
- Alcohol is the second largest cause of drug-related deaths and hospitalizations in Australia after tobacco.
- Alcohol is the main cause of deaths on Australian roads. In 1998, over 2,000 deaths of the total 7,000 deaths of persons under 65 years were related to alcohol.
- In the seven years from 1998-99 to 2004-05, the overall number of hospital separations with principal diagnosis of mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol increased from 23,490 to 35,152; the number per 1,000 population increased by 39% for all ages during that time period (by 41% for those under 20 years).
- According to a study by Ridolfo and Stevenson (2001), the largest number of alcohol-related hospital separations among both men and women in 1998 was due to alcohol and alcohol liver cirrhosis. The second-largest number was due to road injuries for men and cancer for women.
- It has been estimated that 31,132 Australians died from alcohol-caused disease and injury between 1992 and 2001; of these 75% were male and 25% female. From 1993-94 to 2000-01, there were over half a million hospitalizations due to alcohol drinking in Australia.
- At the community level, the estimated economic cost of alcohol to the Australian community in 1998-99 totaled \$7.6 billion, and this estimate includes associated factors such as crime and violence, treatment costs, loss of productivity and premature death.

Please consider that more families are destroyed by alcohol than cigarettes and yet the "Code of Conduct" document bans smoking and not alcohol.

Also consider that alcohol is a dangerous **drug**.

Your vote carries weight. Should the amendment by the Executive, which only discusses drunkenness and not consumption of alcohol, fails to gain the number of votes required, then it does not become the code of conduct at this time and it can be revisited in two years at the next conference.

Secondly:-

### **Divorce and remarriage**

This is a very emotive issue, and I am aware that there are innocent people caught up in the tragedy of marriage brokenness. However I feel strongly that we must adhere to what the Scripture teaches on this matter or reap a harvest of divorce and remarriage that can be aligned with the "any cause" of the Pharisees.

Two things are absolutely clear in scripture:-

- 1. God is against divorce as it destroys many people.**  
Malachi 2:15-16.

## 2. Jesus gives only one ground for divorce and remarriage, that being sexual immorality. Matt 19:4-8, Matt 5:31-32 Mark 10:10-12.

These Scriptures show Jesus strengthening the marriage covenant in the Adam and Eve motif, and answering the **permission** (not commandment) by Moses as the result of a "hardened heart" In the same context Jesus clearly gives his answer to the divorce question irrespective of what the Pharisees and Sadducees thought, and that is that divorce and remarriage is permitted only on the grounds of "*porneia*" which is defined in the document from the Executive. Jesus' definitive statement is the final authority for believers of all cultures who live in the authority of the written words of Jesus.

### Divorce based on physical abuse.

The statement from the Executive, lists, "divorce on the basis of physical abuse," The Scripture referenced is **Ex. 21:10-11**. Physical abuse is not mentioned in these verses. It deals with provision of food, clothes and intimacy. There could be a swell of complaint on all those issues!!! Will we allow these complaints to be reasons for divorce? The context of these verses deals with treatment of slaves which is not relevant to our society. Furthermore the verses permit more than one wife (**v9**) which is disallowed by AOG policy and N.T. teaching.

The other Scriptures provided are:

<b>Eph. 5:28-29</b>	(Not dealing with divorce or remarriage)
<b>Isaiah 58:3-6</b>	(Not dealing with divorce or remarriage)
<b>Luke 4:18-19</b>	(Not dealing with divorce or remarriage)
<b>1 Tim. 3:3</b>	(Not dealing with divorce or remarriage, but leadership)
<b>Titus 1:7</b>	(Not dealing with divorce or remarriage, but leadership)

Many other behaviors are mentioned in the above verses. (e.g. much wine drinking) Are they all to be considered reasons for divorce? A legal definition for abuse can be just a raised voice. Where will we all stand? Hurt feelings will become emotional abuse, and an angry word will become verbal abuse; and where will it end?

Consider the floodgate that these unscriptural reasons for divorce will open and vote "**NO**" to this policy directive.

As unpopular as it may seem let us adhere to the high standard for marriage.

In **Matthew 19** it appears that the disciples felt that Jesus' standard for marriage was too high. The high standard for marriage is honoured by Jesus and He categorically declares that the only ground for remarriage is when one is the victim of sexual unfaithfulness. Would we lower His standard? Rather let us work harder at providing help for those experiencing difficulty in marriage. Rather than opening the floodgates on divorce. I would encourage the provision of anointed Godly counsel as preventative of the curse of divorce that is causing so much pain, to not only adults but also many children. Please note that the comments from the committee speak about Neglect being Grounds for divorce which is now changed to Physical abuse but some of the same scriptures are used which have no reference to either physical abuse or neglect.

## Let us consider these Scriptures:-

### 1 Cor. 7: 10-11

The command is that a wife must not leave her husband nor a husband leaves his wife. If the wife/husband does have to separate (maybe for safety) then they can leave the partner but are to remain unmarried or be reconciled. Jesus has already clarified what permits a divorce and remarriage. Also read 1 Corinthians 7:39.

### Is divorce and remarriage for the guilty party the “unpardonable sin?”

God will always forgive, offering a fresh start to all of us when we truly confess our sins and repent. Therefore, even in an adulterous relationship, there is forgiveness. However, rather than seek ways of lowering the standard of marriage, let's keep it in high honour. This will result in fewer Christians going through the pain of divorce. If you believe in the above, vote 'NO' to the amendment.

### Your vote is your voice on this debate. Attend conference and be heard.

Firstly remember that the conference is the ruling body of our fellowship. That means you. Only the collective body of delegates has the power to legislate. The executive then is responsible to administer the decisions of the conference. At the conference sitting every delegate is on an equal playing field with one vote each. The chairman is to remain **neutral**. This provides our movement with protection from central control through the scriptural and conference votes of representatives from local churches, who are responsible for the rules that govern our movement. **Your vote has value so use it according to your conscience and the Word of God.**

### How should I vote?

1. If you believe that ministers should abstain from alcohol and so not be a “stumbling block” but an example to the community then vote- **“NO”**
2. If you have doubts about the Scriptural grounds for divorce and remarriage as presented in the statement from the Executive and feel that Jesus' words give *porneia* as the only grounds for divorce and remarriage, then vote **“NO”**

Please feel free to contact me concerning any of the issues raised. I appreciate hearing all points of view and am willing to have my points of view challenged and even adjusted.

Let us come together for conference with prayerful hearts and a spirit of love and maturity as we seek at all times to do the will of God.

Andrew & Lorraine Evans