

# A Study Of Mental Divorce

**Introduction.** The issue of “mental divorce” is a hot topic among brethren. It has been fervently discussed in so many places. It is also a timely topic as well. Because of its relevance to the debate on divorce and remarriage, we are going to briefly examine it today, hoping to set emotions aside and view the subject from a biblical perspective.

## I. **Explanation**

- A. The basic position states that God does not recognize a divorce or marriage that He does not approve (i.e., He does not consider it a divorce or marriage unless He approves it).
  - 1. For example, a wife divorces her husband. He tries to keep the marriage together, but fails. At time of the divorce, neither she nor her husband had committed fornication.
  - 2. Later, after he has been divorced for some time, his wife remarries. He claims that he now has the right to “put her away” (divorce her) mentally because she had no scriptural right to divorce him and God did not recognize their first (civil) divorce.
- B. Someone who held this position once wrote, “This is to affirm that I have read bro. \_\_\_\_\_ material. I agreed with him that our differences on how to treat one whose mate is guilty of fornication following a divorce which he tried to avoid is a difference of judgment in the realm of application of the one law of divorce and remarriage and not the teaching of another law.”
  - 1. In the institutional controversy, Guy N. Woods always agreed on the ways to establish Bible authority. His only difference was in the realm of application.
  - 2. Where does New Testament talk about “fornication following a divorce” giving anyone the right to remarry?
- C. A basic summary of the position.
  - 1. Not all divorces are real divorces; not all marriages are real marriages.
  - 2. All marriages are lawful in God’s sight (if a marriage is not lawful, it is not really a marriage). All divorces are lawful in God’s sight (if a divorce is not lawful, it is not really a divorce).

## II. **Equivocation**

- A. The previous point demonstrated the process of equivocation. To equivocate is to use misleading language, to use a key word in two or more senses.
  - 1. For example, a sign said, “Fine for parking here.” Since it was “fine,” I parked there! Another example would be someone saying that a

plane is a carpenter's tool, and since the Boeing 747 is a plane, the Boeing 747 is a carpenter's tool.

2. Someone was "baptized" for a reason other than the forgiveness of sins. When he learns what the New Testament teaches on the subject, he says that the forgiveness of sins was the reason he was "baptized." He tries to make his present knowledge fit his past action, but it will not work (Acts 19:1-7).
  3. Some make the same word (divorce) mean something real and actual (if God approves), or something unreal and nonexistent (if God does not approve). Yet Jesus used the one word to include approved and unapproved divorces.
- B. Nobody hearing the Lord's pronouncements would have reached the conclusion that He was using "divorce" and "marry" in two different senses: "This time He means real divorce ..." "Now He says divorce, but means something else." Consider an examination of these five verses.
1. Matthew 5:32.
    - a) This verse proves that man has the power to divorce his wife for a cause other than fornication. This is sinful, but real!
    - b) The same term is used for a scriptural putting away (for fornication) and unscriptural putting away (not for fornication). The issue is not whether God approves of the action -- He does not. The issue is whether He recognizes it. He clearly does.
    - c) Since the man's unlawful divorce causes his wife to commit adultery, she was innocent at the time he divorced her.
      - (1) This woman is unjustly put away, and yet, the Lord still calls it divorce. Did He mean what He said? If not, was He guilty of deception? He called it divorce!
      - (2) If we grant a false teacher the right to decide when the Lord means what He says and when He does not, he can prove anything!
        - (a) What if someone in the audience said, "No, Lord, she's not really put away because she's innocent"? If that is true, why did Jesus say the opposite?
        - (b) According to this passage, an innocent person may be put away (cf. Matthew 19:6).
    - d) Where does this passage (or any other) give this put away woman the right to remarry?
    - e) What did Jesus mean when He said that her remarriage to another would constitute "adultery"? Is this hard to understand? A put away person commits adultery when he or she remarries.
    - f) Where does it tell us if the woman agreed with the divorce or protested it? All we know is that she was put away; it says

nothing concerning her right later to put him away and then remarry another. We must respect the silence of the scriptures!

- g) The only exception belongs to the person who does the putting away for fornication -- not to the put away person!
2. Matthew 19:9.
- a) Does "divorce" mean the same in both occurrences in this passage? Does God approve of this man's frivolous divorce? Does He still call it divorce, thus recognizing what he has done?
  - b) Does "marry" mean the same both times? Does God approve of this man's remarriage? Does He still call it marriage, thus recognizing what he has done?
  - c) What is the condition of the man who puts away his wife and remarries another not for the cause of fornication?
  - d) May the put away person remarry another? If so, where does this passage or any other say so?
  - e) When does "except for fornication" phrase apply? At the time of the divorce, or days, weeks, months or years later?
  - f) Do we know whether the wife in this text wanted the divorce or fought it? For example, does it say that putting her away required her consent? Since the text does not discuss her attitude, does it affect the Lord's conclusion?
  - g) Since the woman is put away not for the cause of fornication, and she is therefore innocent, does that change what the text says about her remarriage to another?
  - h) Where does it say that this put away woman may later divorce this man after he remarries? What would there be for her to divorce? Could the multitude later mentally send Jesus away (cf. Matthew 15:32, 39)?
3. Mark 6:17-18.
- a) Herodias was Philip's wife (Herod's brother), but Herod "had married her" (Herodias).
  - b) John said this marriage was "not lawful." However, God recognized the marriage between Herod and Herodias, but He did not approve of it because it was not in harmony with His law.
  - c) He recognizes a variety of sins, but He does not approve of them. For instance, is murder lawful? No! Does God recognize it? Yes!
4. Luke 16:18.
- a) What does "divorce" mean in its two uses in this passage? If divorce does not mean divorce, what does it mean, and why did not Jesus say that?
  - b) Is the put away woman divorced or not? Though Jesus did not approve of this putting away, what did He call it? If the sinful

putting away is nothing as some teach, then what difference would it make who initiated it?

- c) When someone else marries this put away woman, is she still married to her first husband? If so, is not a marriage to two men at once a case of polygamy?
  - d) Is this woman married to the second man, or not? What did Jesus say? Did He mean it? Is the second man married to her, or not?
  - e) This man divorces his wife and remarries another; what happens when his first wife marries again? Adultery!
  - f) In this passage, who receives the right to marry again? Does God approve of the divorce and remarriages in this verse? No! What did He call it? He referred to them as "divorced" and "married."
5. Romans 7:2-3.
- a) If this woman, while bound to her first husband, marries another man, is she bound to two men?
  - b) Does "marry" ("joined," ASV) have two different meanings in this passage? She is married two times but only one is approved, but Paul uses the same term to describe both.

### III. **Emotion**

- A. Many good people have known the truth and stood for it without faltering until a child gets involved in divorce and remarriage, and then suddenly they "rethink" their position in a way that allows a remarriage for their child. What has happened? The scriptures have not changed. Emotions have replaced revelation.
- B. Someone may say, "It is not fair for the innocent party to be put away and have to remain celibate."
  - 1. According to 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, when two divorce not for fornication, they must "remain unmarried" or be reconciled to each other.
    - a) Paul recognizes that a divorce leaves a person "unmarried." This woman is still "bound" to her husband, but she is not married to him.
    - b) He gives no permission for either to remarry someone else.
  - 2. The only way to evade what Jesus said is to change the put away person into the one who puts away. So, they claim that when the husband puts away his wife not for fornication, this is not a real putting away; but later (perhaps many years later), if he remarries, then she can actually and really put him away. Why? Not because Jesus taught this, but because of emotions.

- a) What if her husband never remarried? Would she not have to live a celibate life?
  - b) Is this fair? Is she still not a victim? May she remarry? No wonder some call it the waiting game!
3. Job was an innocent victim who lost his children. Life was not fair to this godly man. However, he proves that it is right to serve God when he did not have a protective hedge around him. We cannot change the Bible to remove every bad consequence. If children of God are immune to problems and mistreatment, people will obey the gospel for the wrong reasons and only the evil will suffer.

**Conclusion.** So after all of the mental gymnastics, all we have is what Jesus said (Matthew 5:32). What is so hard to understand? We either believe it or we do not. If we accept mental divorce at the end of a marriage, why not mental marriage at the beginning of a marriage (cf. Matthew 1:20, 24)? Let's say a young couple in lust decide that they are married. How could you know for sure?

We must respect only what Jesus said without emotional ties changing the revelation of God. We can only hope that God will give us the strength and the ability to look at a subject without prejudice.