

“MENTAL DIVORCE,” THE GREAT MISCHARACTERIZATION

by Bill Reeves

Many good brethren have been mischaracterized as believing in and practicing a fabrication of the devil called “mental divorce.” Those propagating this mischaracterization in recent years have led other many brethren into believing it against their brethren whom before they fully fellowshipped. As a result preachers have had meetings cancelled and others have been isolated from those who insist on this mischaracterization.

Those who have been so falsely misrepresented have repeatedly denied believing in and practicing this lie of the devil, called “mental divorce,” but to little avail. I tremble to think of the destiny of the preachers who in recent years have so loudly hurled the false charge of “mental divorce” against others in this present controversy over divorce and remarriage. I would not want to be in their shoes in the Judgment Day for anything! (See Detail, at end of article)

“Wherein is the mischaracterization?” one asks. Good question and here is the simple explanation:

Jesus, in the passages of the current controversy (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11,12; Luke 16:18), used the Greek word APOLUO. It has two parts: apo = from, and luo = loose. This is the basic meaning. By application it is used in several ways, one of which is the idea of releasing or pardoning (Lk. 6:37). But of divorce, Thayer says that it means “*dismiss from the house, to repudiate*” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, p. 66). I have preached for sixty-one (1945--2006) years in Spanish and used the only version that is common in the Spanish-speaking world (Valera 1909, 1960), which version in the above mentioned passages gives “repudiar” (repudiate) as the translation of “Apoluo.”

No recognized Greek scholar puts courthouse action (legal procedures) in the Greek word “Apoluo.” But *this many brethren have done* and on this false premise have built their mischaracterization of others. They favor Bible versions which use the word “divorce,” the root meaning of which is *separate* (an acceptable translation of “Apoluo”). But those who mischaracterize their brethren use the word “divorce,” *not in its root meaning*, but in an *applied meaning*, which is **legal** (courthouse) recognition, registering or recording of a marital separation! Such an applied meaning is nowhere in the definition of the Greek word “Apoluo.” Let these unjust labelers cite a recognized Greek authority that puts courthouse action in the Greek word “Apoluo!”

So, those who falsely and cruelly label their brethren “mental divorcers” move from *repudiate* to *divorce (in its legal sense only!)* These brethren know that once *legal* action in a courthouse is taken, and the judge’s gavel comes down, *no more such legal action can be taken* by either spouse involved in the legal divorce (actually now *both* are legally divorced people, according to the court). So, what is left for a faithful spouse to do whose mate has committed fornication and has legally divorced him? They tell us: “Nothing, except something purely mental!” Hence, “mental divorce.”

Since two people make vows to each other in marrying, each may do what “Apoluo” means: repudiate! On Mk. 10:12, concerning “Apoluo,” Thayer says “a wife deserting her husband” or that she “repudiated” him (Thayer, p. 66). These brethren, who insist on mischaracterizing others in this matter, do not commonly use the phrase “mental repudiation,” or “mental putting away.” That would not help their

agenda. They of necessity must use the word “divorce” *in its legal sense (and unbiblical sense)* in order to build something of a case. So, monotonously these brethren hurl the epithet of “mental divorce” against their good brethren, some disfellowshipping these good brethren and encouraging others to do the same!

The words that Jesus used in Matt. 19:9 imply that a husband, putting away, or repudiating, his wife for fornication, does not commit adultery upon remarrying. Do all we in the present controversy agree? One would think that we do, *but such is not the case!* These false labelers agree *only if their proviso is intact and untouched: he must not be a legally divorced person!* They will not accept the necessary inference drawn from what Jesus said in Matt. 19:9, and let it stand! They will accept it only if their proviso is added, just as a Baptist accepts Acts 2:38 *provided “for” is made to mean “because of” remission of sins.*

Repudiation is not purely a mental matter. Repudiate is a verb of action! It is rejection. Physical separation follows the initiation of repudiation, and there may even follow *legal procedure*, but the initial action has already been taken when the spouse rejects his mate. Do the labelers of “mental divorce” believe in “mindless divorce?” Is there no mentality involved in legal divorce? *All sane action is preceded by the mind!* Consider Acts 26:9,10: “I verily *thought*....and this I also *did*”. “Apoluo” is a verb of action, and means dismiss or repudiate. Both spouses can do this, whether with divine cause or not. “Mental divorce” is a mischaracterization!

The preachers who in recent years have so loudly hurled the false charge of “mental divorce” against others must stand before Jesus Christ, the Judge, to answer for having falsely labeled brethren, for having mischaracterized them. They will be in the company of all false labelers, such as those who hang around the necks of brethren the epithets of “Campbellites” or “antis.” May they desist in such carnal tactics while there is still time to do so!

To help brethren understand the meaning of what Jesus meant when he said “Apoluo,” have them consider the following scenario:

A husband, who has committed fornication with another woman, declares to his faithful wife that he is through with her, rejecting his vows to her, because he no longer loves her. He tells her that he is leaving her, and that he is going to legally divorce her. Then he separates himself from her, leaving the premises, and she no longer sees him. He calls a lawyer and makes an appointment to see him a week later about initiating legal divorce from his wife so that he can marry his lover. Before his appointment with the lawyer arrives, he dies of a heart attack.

The question, expressed in different ways, that demands an answer:

Did this husband repudiate his wife? Yes, or no?

Did he reject her? Yes, or no?

Did he “Apoluo” her? Yes, or no?

Did he divorce her? Yes, or no?

I answer unequivocally to each of these questions: Yes! What will my over-scrupulous brother answer? That husband certainly repudiated his wife. He certainly rejected her. He “Apoluoed” her by doing exactly what Jesus forbids a spouse to do, unless he has the **cause** of fornication against his mate for so doing. He divorced her, because “divorce” basically means “separate,” and he physically separated her

from himself; he dismissed her. (I did not ask if he “**legally** divorced” her! He died before he could do that).

“Apoluo” is a verb of action. Repudiate, a proper English translation of the Greek word, is a verb of action. Repudiate means reject, and reject is not simply a mental process, but a verb of action. The label of “mental divorce,” prejudicially hurled at others simply because no courthouse action is taken, is cruel and unjust representation of others. May my good brethren not lose their soul over such a carnal tactic!

The use of prejudicial labels is a matter of carnality. Consider:

Why do Baptists call us “Campbellites”? Answer: to prejudice the minds of Baptists and others against us. Carnal tactic!

Why do institutional brethren call conservative brethren “antis?” Answer: to prejudice the minds of their supporters against us. Carnal tactic!

Why do some brethren, binding their scruples on others to the division of the brotherhood, call other brethren “mental divorcers?” Answer: to prejudice the minds of brethren against them. Carnal tactic!

Here is a question to put to those who unjustly hurl the label of “mental divorce” at other brethren in this present controversy: “Is *repudiate*, an English definition given by Thayer for the Greek word APOLUO, a verb of **action** or a verb indicating **only a mental process**, like the verb “think?” Demand an answer; no evasion; simply the answer! (Don’t hold your breath while waiting to get the answer). I answer unequivocally: It is a verb of action!

My good but mistaken brethren: I call upon you to abandon your prejudicial language. Follow your conscience in this brotherhood issue. If you cannot grant yourself the divine right that Jesus gives in Matt. 19:9 to the faithful, dutiful spouse, simply because a pagan court has decreed a legal divorce against you, don’t do it. We all will respect your conscience. But don’t bind your scruple on others to the breaking of fellowship and division of the brotherhood!

Detail:

The phrase, “mental divorce,” was originated many years ago, principally by preachers of the West Coast. They affirmed that when two persons agreed to divorce for just any reason, and afterwards one of the two committed adultery, then the other one, with just thinking in his mind that he divorces the mate since he now has the cause of fornication against him, could go and remarry. This in reality is “mental divorce.”

All we in the present controversy completely reject such an idea. So, when in the present controversy someone claims to know some who admit to believing in “mental divorce,” and therefore that it is legitimate to use that term, he has to have in mind those preachers of the West Coast who long ago (or until the present time, perhaps) employed the term. But he well knows that such a term does not apply to us in the present controversy who are labeled “mental divorcers,” because we have repeatedly said that we do not believe any such thing. For a couple to agree to divorce with such a plan in mind (mental divorce) is to violate Matt. 5:32! “Mental divorce” and “the waiting game” go hand in glove.

But there are brethren that continue to apply the term erroneously, and by now most if not all do it knowingly!

