

HOW TO PERSUADE BRETHREN TO TURN AGAINST, AND SHUN, THE SO-CALLED “MENTAL DIVORCERS”

by Bill Reeves

I have been preaching the same thing, in reference to MDR, since 1943, but not until lately, in this present century, have I been labeled a “mental divorcer!” Why all of a sudden am I so labeled? I have been in full fellowship with my conservative brethren for all of those years of the last century and for the first few of this one. Why, all of a sudden, have I been disfellowshipped by some?

The answer lies in the efforts that some zealots have made in the last few years to promote their scruple to the division of the brotherhood. They have succeeded in persuading many brethren to turn against and shun those whom they falsely call “mental divorcers” (in cases, working to get gospel meetings cancelled on them). Apparently others have lined up with them, lest they themselves get disfellowshipped and lose their circle of friends with which they have enjoyed a long relationship. (Of course, God does not give us a spirit of fearfulness, or cowardice, as some versions put it, 2 Tim. 1:7). But some brethren must be running scared.

The tactic followed by these divisive brethren, to turn others against and shun the so-called “mental divorcers,” is a simple one-two-three approach.

1. First, they are careful to use the word “divorce” instead of put away or repudiate. They know that the general public, in hearing the word “divorce,” will not think of its *root* meaning, which is “separation,” but the common *applied* meaning of courthouse, legal action. This is germane to their tactic. (They don’t refer to “Mental Put-Aways” or “Mental Repudiators.” They know that to realize the desired effect on others they must use the phrase, “mental divorcers”).

2. They begin the message of their campaign with an ABSOLUTE, stating more or less these words: “There is no authority for a divorced woman to remarry,” or, “one who marries a person who is put-away commits adultery.” They usually follow this with such phrases as, Sounds simple, doesn’t it? or, I’m just saying what Jesus said, or, These passages still say what they have always said.

3. Then, after taking passages out of context, and misrepresenting many of the brethren, tagging them with the unfair label of “mental divorcers,” and even stating that some believe in couples’ fornicating in the back seat of a car, or in a motel, provided that they merely *decide* that they are married, they close with their absolute. They resort to prejudicial language to support their case; how sad! (As to the “back seat” episode, I certainly do not believe such nor does the cross-section of those labeled “mental divorcers.” In fact, I personally know of no one *in the present controversy* who so believes!)

This is the simple “rule book” that they all follow; this is their approach to prejudice minds against good brethren, which thing gets them isolated.

Many brethren hearing this are undiscerning, and they swallow the message hook, line and sinker, just as some readily accept what the Baptist preacher says, after citing fifty passages with the

word “faith” in them, and then saying, I’ll just stick with what the Scriptures say: We are saved by faith.

Sometimes, especially when pressed, they give exceptions to their absolute! We all know that *an absolute can have no exception*, but the reader or listener is not supposed to catch that. “The sun rises in the east, most of the time.” What? “God is love, except when this or that.” What? “Ice is cold, unless this or that.” What? Fried snowballs? Some will talk about how that a put-away person may remarry if the spouse, who legally did the putting-away, dies. They rightly cite Rom. 7:2,3. Most will also admit that a put-away (legally divorced) person may be reconciled to the spouse who did the divorcing, and remarry him. They rightly cite 1 Cor. 7:10,11. These exceptions go against their absolute, but when pressed they have to state them. But they always close their presentation, by which they begin it, by stating their absolute again,

Well, do you want to see if our brethren really believe what they are so repetitiously affirming? If so, put this question to them: “Do you believe that ‘there is no authority for a divorced woman to remarry’?” or, “Do you believe that ‘whoever marries a put-away woman commits adultery’?” Demand a Yes or No answer. Do not accept a “Yes, but,” or a “No, unless.” They go around stating their absolute, with no ifs and buts attached, so let them now tell us whether or not (Yes or No) they believe it! The cautious one among them will not answer you, Yes or No. He should, since he, like a broken record, has made his absolute statement over and over again. But he is too intelligent to do so.

But, should one say, Yes, then ask him if he is disposed to debate the issue, affirming his absolute: “The Scriptures teach *that there is no authority for a divorced woman to remarry*,” or “The Scriptures teach that *whoever marries a put-away woman commits adultery*.” Most won’t dare affirm in debate a proposition that states that the Scriptures teach what they affirm. Isn’t that strange? They long and loud make their claim, but *won’t affirm that the Scriptures teach it!* They want their exceptions in the proposition, but they don’t go around stating their exceptions in their perceived “absolutes.”

Now, if someone does agree to affirm that the Scriptures teach one of those absolute statements, that these brethren are constantly airing, he is in one of two situations;

- (1) either he is in serious trouble because he believes that there are at least two exceptions to the “absolute” rule, but his proposition of an absolute will not admit any exceptions, or
- (2) he is in the unenviable position of denying the teaching in Rom. 7:2,3 and 1 Cor. 7:10,11. If he does this, the brethren in his camp will reject him, because they grant two exceptions to their absolute!

Brethren, put these labelers to the test: ***Insist that they affirm that the Scriptures teach exactly what they state as an absolute!***

Let me clarify that IN CONTEXT, Matt. 19:9 and Lk. 16:18 are absolutes! When a putting-away is done, and fornication is not the cause, then either spouse commits adultery upon remarrying. This is true of the one putting away (Lk. 16:18a) or the one so put away (16:18b). Our erring brethren talk about the “b” part as absolute; they put the “put-away woman” in a “box” (a category, or classification). But they don’t have a “putting-away man” box for part “a”. Bro. Joel Gwin, in our debate in 2003 in Hopkinsville, KY argued that part “a” is NOT absolute, but that part “b” IS absolute.

No, BOTH IN CONTEXT are absolute. If a man does not have the cause of fornication against his wife, but repudiates her and marries again, he is guilty of adultery. And if a wife so put away (that is, without there being a cause of fornication against her) should marry again, she also commits adultery. In both cases God did not release either one from his vows and so both absolutely commit adultery upon remarriage. There are no exceptions.

Well, Bro. Reeves, do you believe those absolutes that are circulated by those calling you a “mental divorcer?” No, I do not. There is always a *context* for statements that are made. (**In the context** in which **Jesus** stated the words of Lk. 16:18 both the “a” part and the “b” part are absolute, the context being that there was no cause of fornication for the putting-away of the wife, and no cause of fornication for her to repudiate the husband and to marry again). I do not believe them because they purposely are made without a context and are applied to a scenario not treated by Jesus. I believe the absolute statements of Jesus in his context, not the absolute statements of some of my brethren who take these passages out of context.

Back in 2003 Bro. Joel Gwin was very insistent upon a public debate, but when we two agreed to do the debating he would not accept my proposed affirmative proposition. I proposed that the Scriptures teach that the innocent, faithful, vow-keeping spouse has a divine right to repudiate the fornicator-mate and to remarry. This is what the words of Jesus in Matt. 19:9a imply. He objected to my proposed proposition on the grounds that he himself believed that proposition, but actually he did **not, unless** he could add his proviso: the faithful spouse can’t be one already legally divorced in the court of men. Of course, Jesus didn’t attach a proviso to what he said.

These brethren stop short in stating their famous absolute. They abbreviate it on purpose for effect, but actually do not believe their own absolute because they have exceptions to it! They won’t debate the issue with their proposition stating that the Bible teaches their absolute. No, they must have their exceptions in the proposition and in doing so they surrender their absolute, for an absolute has no exceptions! They know that they could not state their absolutes, attach their provisos to them, and then claim that that is what Jesus said! So, they simply take Jesus’ words out of Jesus’ context and apply them arbitrarily to an entirely different scenario. But, it all has convinced a good number of brethren. Again, how sad.

They won’t debate one with the proposition as I stated in general above, **unless** he is willing to include somehow their proviso in the wording. Why not? Because actually they do not believe what the words of Jesus in Matt. 19:9a imply: that is, that the faithful spouse has the divine right to put away a fornicator mate and to remarry. They believe it **only if their proviso is added to it!**