

***If a man puts away his scriptural wife for a reason other than fornication and then commits fornication, may the original wife remarry?***

***Introduction:***

In this lesson we want to discuss the position advocated by Weldon Warnock when he wrote:

“But someone asks: ‘What about a woman who is put away (divorced) by a man simply because the man no longer wanted to be married? Fornication is not involved and the woman repeatedly tried to prevent the divorce, but to no avail. After a couple of years the man marries another woman. Is the ‘put away’ woman then free to marry? She certainly is, if she puts away her husband for fornication. She would have to do this before God in purpose of heart since the divorce has already taken place, legally speaking. She could not go through the process of having a legal document charging her husband with ‘adultery,’ but God would know . . .’” (Searching The Scriptures, 11/85).

Brother Warnock described a man who puts away or divorces his wife when fornication is NOT involved. That man later – perhaps a couple of years later – marries another woman. Brother Warnock asks, “Is the ‘put away’ woman then free to marry?”

He did not leave us to wonder about the answer, at least from his perspective. He says, “She certainly is, if she puts away her husband for fornication.”

Notice that, in brother Warnock’s scenario, there is a first putting away that happens before fornication occurs. Then later – maybe a couple of years later – after fornication occurs, there is a second putting away. Our question for consideration in this lesson involves the concept of this second putting away. Where is the Bible for that? Where is the divine authority for any such thing?

Finally, observe that brother Warnock said this second putting away could only be done “in purpose of heart” because he acknowledged that the divorce had already taken place. I am not sure where the label “mental divorce” came from, but it may very well have resulted from this statement by brother Warnock. The phrase “mental divorce” is not used disrespectfully or prejudicially. It is simply used as a concise way of identifying what brother Warnock and others have taught.

Brother Warnock was not the only one who taught this position. A couple years after his article appeared in Searching the Scriptures, Marshall Patton debated H. E. Phillips in the pages of that same journal (Feb., Mar., Apr., 1987). Brother Patton argued essentially the same point as brother Warnock. He said: “The Scriptures teach that the innocent person (free of fornication) who has been put away without God’s or his/her approval and against whom adultery has been committed may remarry . . . Of course, the woman of my proposition must wait until fornication is committed against her before remarriage . . . Whether the fornication is committed before or after the putting away by human authority is immaterial.”

In 2003 Bill Reeves debated my son, Joel, in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Brother Reeves was in the negative for both nights of the debate and was denying this proposition: "*The Bible teaches that if a man puts away his scriptural wife for a reason other than fornication and then commits fornication, the original wife may not remarry.*" Of course, in denying this proposition, brother Reeves was arguing that the original wife could remarry. In an email post leading up to the debate he stated that his position on the remarriage of the put away wife "... admits of no exceptions . . . It admits of no conditions or exceptions"

Ron Halbrook, in an email correspondence, wrote: ". . . if (the husband) commits adultery (before or after his action in the courts of man) . . . (the wife) may put away, reject, or divorce him as a moral and spiritual act."

We hope these quotes help to identify the specific question we are assigned to address. This has been a 'hot button' topic among brethren. Alienation and division have resulted. We seek to know what the Bible teaches.

I. The issue is NOT:

- A. That an innocent mate has certain conditional rights granted by God.
- B. A "race to the courthouse." In the type of "mental divorce" scenario we are discussing, a so-called "race to the courthouse" is not an issue.
  - 1. The man put away his scriptural wife when neither of them had committed fornication
  - 2. The fornication occurred AFTER the divorce had been obtained by the husband
  - 3. Therefore, the wife had no "cause" to put away her husband at the time he was unjustly filing for a divorce against her
  - 4. She had no reason to even go to the courthouse, much less race to the courthouse
- C. About "counter suits." Although this may be a question to address in other divorce scenarios, it is not at issue here
- D. That we are binding some specific procedure in order to "put away" a spouse and scripturally remarry. (more comments to follow)
- E. That man's law supersedes God's law.
- F. What is written or specified on the court documents.
- G. Reconciliation of a divorced couple. (I Corinthians 7:10,11 authorizes the reconciliation of unscripturally divorced couples.)
- H. What happens after the death of a spouse. This is a question of some controversy, but is not our assignment in this lesson.
- I. The definition of Greek words like "apoluo." (more comments to follow)

II. The issue IS:

- A. Is a divorce really a divorce?
- B. Does God “recognize” a “putting away” which occurs for reasons other than fornication?
- C. Is it possible for an innocent mate to be “put away in the eyes of God?”
- D. Can fornication after a divorce be used as justification for a subsequent “mental divorce” and remarriage?
- E. Is there any authority for a “second putting away?”
- F. Does the Bible teach a necessary order which must be followed to allow scriptural remarriage?
- G. Can “put away” mean different things depending upon circumstances?
- H. Is the “waiting game” OK?

III. We are not arguing for specific court/civil government procedures.

- A. In every culture or society there is a recognized convention that designates a man and woman as being “married.” For instance, some have told of certain primitive tribes in which a man and a woman, desiring to be married, would hold hands and jump over a broomstick. In that case, we would stress that those living in that culture need to comply with that procedure – identifying themselves as a married couple rather than mere fornicators. And, we all agree, that when a man and woman are thus “married,” there are consequences which follow.
- B. Similarly, in every culture or society there is a recognized method by which a marriage is terminated. It might be – in the primitive tribe previously mentioned – that the husband or wife jumps backwards over the broomstick while pointing at their mate. Regardless of the procedure – remember, I am not here to argue in favor of specific procedures – such a means of identifying the termination of marriage is essential. And, when a marriage has thus been ended, there are consequences which follow, including this biblical one: The remarriage of a “put away” person (to another while their bound mate lives) is specifically forbidden.
- C. The Scriptures are clear about this:
  1. Matthew 5:32 says, “. . . whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”
  2. Matthew 19:9 says, “. . . and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”
  3. Luke 16:18 says, “. . . whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”
- D. God’s Word could not be clearer. If a person has been the object of an action to terminate a marriage, when that put away person remarries another (while their bound mate is still living), it is adultery.

#### IV. The definition of ‘apoluo’ that is applied really does not change the outcome

- A. There has been a lot of discussion about the true meaning of the Greek word “apoluo.” This is the word that is translated “put away” or “divorce” in our English Bibles. Some say that the word involves the civil process of ending a marriage. Others say it has nothing to do with civil procedure.
- B. Here’s my position on the definition of “apoluo” – as pertains to this doctrinal question, you can define “apoluo” any way you want, and the outcome is the same.
- C. Look at the first part of Luke 16:18 – “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery . . .” In this KJV version, “putteth away” is the translation of “apoluo.”
  1. Now look at the outcome for that “put away” woman – “. . . and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”
  2. The woman who has been the object of the verb “apoluo” is left in the position of not being able to remarry without sin.
- D. Since some brethren get very agitated about the proper definition of “apoluo,” and since they argue long and loud about whether it includes civil procedure or not, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll let you define “apoluo” any way you want – and I think we’ll see that the outcome is always the same!
  1. For instance, some brethren like to use the word “repudiate” to translate “apoluo.” That’s a fair and accurate translation of the word. So, put it in here: “Whosoever repudiates his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is repudiated from her husband committeth adultery.” Do you see how the outcome is unchanged?
  2. Others like to substitute “send away” for “apoluo.” That’s also a fine translation of the word. Put it in there: “Whosoever sends away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is sent away from her husband committeth adultery.” Again, we have the same outcome.
  3. Using absurdity to illustrate the point, try this: for the word “apoluo” use the phrase “throws a pie at.” “Whosoever throws a pie at his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that has a pie thrown at her from her husband committeth adultery.”
- E. It’s really very clear. You can define ‘apoluo’ any way you want, and the outcome is the same. The woman that has had “apoluo” happen to her cannot remarry without committing adultery.

#### V. Is a divorce really a divorce? Is a marriage really a marriage?

##### A. Divorce IS Divorce:

1. "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

2. This was clearly an unauthorized – sinful – not ‘for fornication’ divorce.
3. But the outcome was that the parties involved were unmarried

#### B. Marriage IS Marriage

1. "For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: **for he had married her.** For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." (Mark 6:17-18)
2. This was clearly an unauthorized marriage
3. But the outcome was that Herod and Herodias were married

#### C. It IS possible to ‘put away’ an innocent spouse

1. “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” (Luke 6:18)
  - a. The original wife was innocent of fornication.
  - b. We know this because the husband commits adultery when he remarries.
  - c. Yet, Jesus said that she WAS put away
  - d. AND, He said “whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”
2. “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, (omit - except it be for fornication,) and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” (Matthew 19:9)
  - a. The original wife was innocent of fornication.
  - b. We know this because the husband commits adultery when he remarries.
  - c. Yet, Jesus said that she WAS put away
  - d. AND, He said “whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”
3. “But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, (omit - saving for the cause of fornication,) causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.” (Matthew 5:32)
  - a. The original wife was innocent of fornication.
  - b. We know this because her husband “causeth her to commit adultery” – she was not guilty before this occurred.
  - c. Yet, Jesus said that she WAS put away
  - d. AND, He said “whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”

- D. Thus, any argument fails that suggests God doesn't really recognize unscriptural divorces or marriages.
1. Some would argue that such are only 'in the eyes of man' and not 'in the eyes of God'
  2. But in reality, although these are sinful actions, they are recognized by God, and bear consequences.

## VI. Can there be a 'second putting away'?

- A. Since the Bible is silent on this – we wonder:

1. What would be the necessary conditions?
2. What terms must be met?
3. What qualifications would apply?
4. What would be the means of accomplishing it?
5. What method would one follow to do it?
6. How would one verify that this had taken place?

- B. Can one answer these questions while 'speaking as the Bible speaks'?

## VII. The proper order of events IS important

- A. Consider the proper order of the plan of salvation.

1. The Bible teaches that one must believe, be baptized and then he is saved. Mark 16:16 reads: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved . . ."
2. There are those, however, who want to change this God-given order in the plan of salvation. They say that when one believes, he is saved, and then he should/could be baptized later. This is what the Baptists teach, and faithful brethren have always taught that this is wrong because the order is wrong.

- B. Now, let's look at the biblical order regarding divorce and remarriage.

1. The Scriptures teach that when fornication is committed by one of the marriage partners, the innocent party may put away the guilty for this cause, and then the innocent party may remarry without sin. (Matthew 5:32; 19:9)
2. The "mental divorce" position teaches that there can be a putting away - the dissolution of the marriage - NOT for the cause of fornication, and then LATER if fornication occurs, there can be a remarriage.
3. This is WRONG – because the order is wrong! Just like the Baptists are wrong on the order of the plan of salvation, the "mental divorce" position is wrong because the ORDER is wrong!

## VIII. The Waiting Game

- A. Marshall Patton (in the written debate earlier cited) said that he would not defend "those who would play "the waiting game"". He went on to describe a situation "where husband and wife mutually agree to divorce with a view to waiting until the other commits fornication thinking that he/she is then free to remarry. The mutual agreement makes each an active participant in the putting away."
  - 1. This is certainly one type of 'waiting game' that faithful brethren have always condemned.
  - 2. But notice the qualifier brother Patton added: "where husband and wife mutually agree to divorce". Where do we read that in the inspired text?
- B. Brother Patton went on to defend this: "The Scriptures teach that the innocent person (free of fornication) who has been put away without God's or his/her approval and against whom adultery has been committed may remarry . . . Of course, the woman of my proposition must wait until fornication is committed against her before remarriage . . . Whether the fornication is committed before or after the putting away by human authority is immaterial."
- C. Observe that brother Patton said he would not defend "those who would play "the waiting game.""
  - 1. Yet, his proposition definitely described a specific type of 'waiting'.
  - 2. He defended the person "who has been put away without God's or his/her approval". To such persons he claimed the right to 'wait' and then 'remarry'.
  - 3. But notice that he added yet another qualifier that is nowhere stated in scripture. Where can we find any reference to "put away without God's or his/her approval"?
- D. Faithful brethren have always condemned all forms of 'the waiting game' – and rightfully so.

## IX. Who has the right to remarry:

- A. Matthew 19:9a
  - 1. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery"
  - 2. The man who puts away his wife NOT for fornication cannot remarry without sin
  - 3. The man who puts away his wife FOR fornication may remarry without sin
- B. Matthew 19:9b
  - 1. "and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."
  - 2. The woman who is put away FOR fornication obviously cannot remarry without sin
  - 3. BUT, the woman who is put away NOT for fornication also cannot remarry without sin

***Conclusion:***

The question is: If a man puts away his scriptural wife for a reason other than fornication and then commits fornication, may the original wife remarry?

The answer is: No. The original wife may not remarry without sin.

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