

The Lakeview Lamp

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”-Psalm 119:105

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Non-Sexual Adultery and Mental Divorce

Paul K. Williams

(This is the second part of the article, continued from a few weeks ago, with the emphasis on mental divorce.—TN)

Another recent doctrine redefines what the word “divorce” means. The proponents of this theory say that when a person (usually a man) divorces his mate for a cause other than fornication, the divorce is not a “valid” divorce. They have said that when one divorces his wife for a cause other than fornication, the divorce is a “farce”, not a real divorce. Because it is not for the cause of fornication, God does not recognize the divorce; the legal divorce means nothing in God’s sight. Later, when the former wife realizes that her ex-husband is not coming back to her and was committing adultery all the time, she can then decide to “divorce” her ex-husband for the cause of adultery. Since there is no legal way for her to do this, it is a mental act, thus the reason I call it “mental divorce”. This becomes the “valid” divorce and she, therefore, has the right to remarry.

Incidentally, the reasoning that allows the wife to divorce her husband for adultery in her mind after he divorces her legally will allow her to wait until he commits adultery after the divorce and then divorce him mentally. Though the proponents of this theory do not like this consequence of their teaching, it appears to me to be the logical conclusion. If the legal divorce is not a divorce, then if the ex-husband commits adultery after the legal divorce, their doctrine will allow the woman to mentally divorce her husband and remarry without sin. This has been called “the waiting game.” Most of those who are teaching “mental divorce” claim not to believe in the waiting game, but I believe their doctrine allows it.

I consider this to be a very dangerous doctrine. I am persuaded that it is giving comfort to people who are living in adultery. The plain words of

Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 show that the doctrine is false. Let's read those verses again.

“But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”—Matthew 5:32 (NASB)

“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”—Matthew 19:9 (NASB)

Jesus says that a man “divorces” his wife when she is not guilty of unchastity (fornication). That is what Jesus calls the act. He calls it “divorce”. He does not call it “unrecognized divorce” or “farcical divorce” or “invalid divorce.” He uses a word which his hearers and his readers can easily understand. He uses the word “marries” in the same way. He does not say, “marries in an unrecognized way” or “marries in a farcical way” or “marries in an invalid way.” The man “divorces” the woman, and she “marries” another. Simple. Easy to understand.

Understanding the teaching is easy. Any woman who has been divorced by her husband, regardless of the reason for the divorce, commits adultery if she marries another man. The only problem is—we don't like that teaching. We want to find some way out.

So those who are teaching the new theory have redefined the words used by Jesus. But it won't work. Read those verses again. Jesus calls it “divorce” whether it is for the cause of adultery or not. The ONE word is used for both circumstances. It has to mean the same in both cases. There is no way it can be “divorce” for the cause of adultery but “no divorce” in other cases.

Long articles with complicated reasoning will not change this plain truth. There is no room for “mental divorce” in Matthew 5:32 or 19:9. The quote below deals with this very adequately:

“It is the contention of this writer that it is a flagrant violation of language and reasoning to argue that a person is divorced and yet married to the person from whom he/she is divorced. A person may be divorced unscripturally, but he/she is yet divorced; and a person divorced from another person is not married to that person. This business of insisting

that one may be divorced 'in the eyes of men' and not divorced 'in the eyes of God' is nonsense. God may not approve of a given action (divorce or whatever), but that does not mean that the action does not occur because God does not approve of it. A divorce without scriptural grounds is yet a divorce and renders the person divorced 'unmarried.' The argument being advanced here is that: 'All actions not approved of by God become non-actions or actions which do not occur.' If this is the case, then is it legitimate in any sense to speak of an action as having occurred when in actuality it did not occur? It is far better to take the language of a given text as meaning what it says (i.e. married means married, divorced means divorced), than to play this game of semantical gymnastics wherein words do not mean what they mean." [Maurice W. Lusk, III, Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of Jesus and Paul (Atlanta: Guild of Scribes, 1982), pp. 44ff]

Gospel begins with GO.

"Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; and let those who love Your salvation say continually, 'Let God be magnified!'"—Psalm 70:4

Lakeviewchurch of Christ
132 New Shackle Island Road
P.O. Box 514
Hendersonville TN 37077

(615)824-1376

Bible Call: 824-1310
www.BibleSaints.com

Troy Nicholson
troyjenn@bigzoo.net

"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"
(Psalm 118:24).