

The Two Types Of Mental Divorce

Patrick Donahue

The purpose of this article is to Biblically refute the “mental divorce” position advocated by many of our brethren in the past and today. Because some holding to the mental divorce view don’t go as far as others, I usually classify the positions into two different types. Both types say (contrary to God’s word) that a put away woman may remarry if her original husband commits fornication. The first type would allow that remarriage regardless of when the fornication took place. Even if the man commits fornication after he legally divorces his wife unscripturally, this position says she may remarry. The second type would not allow the put away woman to remarry if the fornication (on the part of the man) occurred after the termination of the marriage, but would allow her remarriage only if the fornication took place before the divorce, even though she is not the one who secured the divorce.

Mental Divorce, Type I

The first type of mental divorce is defended by the following two quotes defending it:

Weldon E. Warnock (Searching the Scriptures, Nov 1985): [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 way’ 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 \(see why we call it “mental” divorce? - ptd\) 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 ...](#)

Ron Halbrook (1986 document): [But if he commits adultery \(before or after his action in the courts of man\), there is something else to be said by divine law-by the moral and spiritual law of the court of God. She now may put away, reject, or divorce him as a moral and spiritual act.](#)

Luke 16:18

The above positions are clearly contradicted by Luke 16:18 which reads [“Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”](#) This verse envisions a man let’s call him Fred, who puts away his wife Ethel unlawfully (not for fornication), and then marries Jane. The verse goes on to say it is adultery if someone marries Ethel at this point, after Fred has put her away, and even after Fred has remarried and committed adultery “against” (Mark 10:11) Ethel. This is the exact scenario that our brethren Warnock and Halbrook are defending in their quotes above. Let me make it clear that this isn’t the only scenario Luke 16:18b condemns, but if it condemned only one scenario, the Warnock/Halbrook scenario would be it.

Matthew 19:9 For Fornication

Next let’s focus in on the [“for fornication”](#) option implied by Matthew 19:9a. It would imply [“Whosoever shall put away his wife, for fornication, and shall marry another, doth not commit adultery.”](#) So for a man to be able to remarry (after divorce) without committing adultery, three things must be true:

1. his first wife must have committed fornication

497448552. he must have put away that wife

497448553. fornication must have been the reason he put away (divorced) his wife

Repeating condition #2, the man must have been the one to put away his wife, not the other way around. This contradicts Mr. Warnock's and (my personal friend) Ron's position which says the man may remarry (as long as his previous wife commits fornication somewhere along the way), even if he was not the one to actually secure the divorce. Some only want to emphasize the cause for divorce, but Jesus emphasizes the cause and who does the putting away.

Matthew 19:9 Four Categories

I've heard more than one preacher correctly break Matthew 19:9 down into four categories of people:

1. The one who puts away their spouse for fornication does not commit adultery when they remarry.
2. The one who puts away their spouse for a reason other than fornication commits adultery when they remarry.
3. The one who is put away by their spouse for fornication commits adultery when they remarry.
4. The one who is put away by their spouse for a reason other than fornication commits adultery when they remarry.

Our brothers Warnock and Halbrook are defending a person who falls into category #4, one who God says commits adultery (Luke 16:18b).

Fornication Alone Does Not Break The Bond

We all agree if a man cheats on (commits fornication against) his wife, that the marriage bond does not terminate at the point of that fornication. No, the wife has the option of divorcing her husband for fornication (Matthew 5:32). But she may decide to stay with her husband. In that case, the marriage bond would then remain intact. So we all agree it is not fornication by itself that breaks the marriage bond; it is divorce for the cause of fornication that breaks the bond. But the Warnock/Halbrook position says a woman's bond with her previous husband is broken, simply based upon the fact her previous husband has committed fornication, even though she didn't divorce him for that fornication (instead, he divorced her).

Two Ways To Break The Bond

The Bible only gives two ways the marriage bond can be broken (leaving a person free to remarry without committing adultery):

1. Romans 7:2-3 the death of the spouse
2. Matthew 19:9 the divorce of the spouse for fornication

Neither of the above has occurred with respect to the woman of the Warnock/Halbrook scenarios. Her husband has not died. And she has not divorced her husband for fornication; instead, he has divorced her. If Fred divorces Ethel and marries Jane, Ethel is still bound/obligated to Fred, therefore she is not free to remarry without committing adultery (Romans 7:2-3).

They Are "Put Away"

The Warnock/Halbrook scenario justifies a "put away" woman remarrying, but Jesus said three times marrying a put away woman results in adultery (the reason is because she is still bound/obligated to her former husband, Romans 7:2-3):

1. Matthew 5:32b "[whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery](#)"
2. Matthew 19:9b "[whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery](#)"
3. Luke 16:18b "[whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery](#)"

Some teach as if it doesn't matter who gets the divorce. Well according to Jesus, it makes a big difference who gets the divorce! Jesus describes one spouse as doing the putting away and the other spouse as the one who is put away. The one who is doing the putting away may remarry scripturally if the putting away

was for the cause of fornication. The one being put away may not remarry scripturally no matter what the cause for the divorce was.

Reversing God's Order

The first type of mental divorce is reversing God's order. The Baptist does this when he puts salvation in front of baptism in reverse of the order given by Jesus in Mark 16:16. The Warnock/Halbrook position allows remarriage to occur even if the divorce occurs before the fornication, which is the reverse of the Bible order, which says the divorce must be for fornication, necessarily implying the fornication must occur before the divorce.

Mental Divorce, Type II

I received an e-mail on September 27, 2001, where Harry Osborne wrote [“I believe the vast majority would also affirm that an innocent party in a marriage sundered for the cause of fornication has the right to remarry even if the guilty fornicator filed first and secured the civil divorce. ... the vast majority have agreed with me.”](#) As you can see, this quote defends the second type of mental divorce as I classified them in this article's introduction. Both of these types of mental divorce stand or fall together. If you can get a scriptural divorce mentally, why would it make any difference if the fornication occurred before the civil court action? It would only matter if the fornication occurred before the mental divorce/repudiation action, right?

What Constitutes A Divorce Is Not The Critical Issue

Though Harry tried to argue the critical difference between us is “what constitutes a divorce?” (and we will deal with that question momentarily), that is not the real issue. Realize that when a fornicator goes to the trouble of securing a civil divorce against his innocent mate, he almost certainly has, somewhere along the line, mentally and verbally “repudiated” (the mental divorcer's synonym for “put away”) his wife. According to the mental divorce position then, that would mean the innocent wife is “put away” even before the legal divorce is secured by either party. Therefore (by that reasoning) the innocent wife would be a “put away” woman even if she ended up securing the legal divorce against her husband for fornication. But Harry would correctly allow that woman to remarry, even though she had been repudiated (“put away” according to Harry's position). This tells us the real issue is not “what constitutes a divorce,” but the real issue is, is it possible for a fornicator to unlawfully put away his mate? In effect, Harry's position says no that it is not possible. But Luke 16:18 shows it is very possible (not scriptural) for any man (fornicator or not) to put away his wife in a sinful way.

What Does “Put Away” Mean?

Let me repeat emphatically, the question about what constitutes a “putting away” is not the critical issue in the “mental divorce” controversy. Even if we agreed with the “mental divorce” false teachers on what constitutes a divorce, they would still be wrong in saying that a put away (“repudiated” – their meaning) woman could remarry if her rightful husband has committed adultery. But “what constitutes a divorce?” is a difference between us, so let's examine it. As you might suspect, our English word “divorce” is a good synonym for “apoluo” (“[put away](#)” in Matthew 19:9). This can be seen by reading the definitions for “apoluo” in Thayer's, Strong's, Vine's, Berry's, The Analytical Greek Lexicon, and Green's Greek Concordance, each of which mentions the English word “divorce” in defining the word. English translations also bear this out as “apoluo” is translated into a form of the word “divorce” in Matthew 5:32 in the KJV, and Matthew 5:32 (twice), 19:3, 9, Mark 10:11, 12, and Luke 16:18 in the NKJV and NASV. Knowing that our English word “divorce” is a good synonym for “apoluo,” it would make sense to define

“divorce” from an English dictionary. (for the same reason we might use a Bible dictionary to define “baptizo” as “immerse” and then use our English dictionary to find out that “immerse” means “to cover completely in a liquid; submerge.”) Here are some ways “divorce” is defined by English dictionaries at www.dictionary.com (my emphasis):

- The legal dissolution of a marriage
- To end marriage with (one’s spouse) by way of legal divorce
- To dissolve the marriage contract
- A legal dissolution of the marriage contract by a court or other body having competent authority. This is properly a divorce, and called, technically, divorce
- the legal dissolution of a marriage
- get a divorce; formally terminate a marriage

Admittedly the above method for determining the meaning for “apoluo” is not intended to be complete, because I did not exhaust all the given definitions, and because some English dictionaries give modern definitions for words (like “sprinkle, pour, or immerse” for “baptize”). But I did want the reader to see those definitions, as they have a bearing on this issue. It seems in our society, divorce involves a legal procedure, doesn’t it? Indeed, isn’t that the way we’ve always understood the word, until the recent attempts to justify these type of unlawful re-marriages?

What Is The Procedure For “Putting Away”

So how do we know that in the United States, a legal procedure must be followed to divorce a spouse? Because God teaches in passages like Romans 13:1 and I Peter 2:13 we must follow the laws of the land. Since the laws of the U.S. require a legal procedure be followed in getting a divorce, then we must follow/obey that. I am confident the reader will agree with this when it comes to getting married. Who among us thinks a young couple can avoid fornication together by simply asserting to the elders that they are married, without actually doing what State law prescribes (marriage license, etc.)? So if you don’t believe in “mental” marriages, then why would you believe in “mental” divorces? We are bound by the law of our society in other areas too. The speed limit is one example that all would agree with.

Conclusion: It Matters Who Gets The Divorce

One preacher said, “I [never really thought it made any difference who got the divorce.](#)” Well, Luke 16:18 forever shows it does matter who gets the divorce. If it didn’t matter, the put away woman of the ‘b’ part of this verse would be allowed to remarry, since her husband had committed adultery against her. But even though he had committed adultery, the verse says her remarriage would result in adultery. The reason is because she did not secure the divorce from her husband. She had the grounds, but she couldn’t take advantage of those grounds because her husband had already divorced her. The marriage was no longer in existence. The marital bond still existed, but not the marriage. So there was nothing left to divorce (put away).

Because of passages like Philippians 1:17, Acts 15:2,7, 17:17, 19:8-9, Matthew 22:15-46, John 3:19-21, and Jude 3, I asked all three of the men named/quoted in this article in years gone by to defend what they believe in public (oral) debate against either me or another capable man (their choice). But sadly, all three refused.

Reply to Pat Donahue and *Two Types of Mental Divorce*

Jeff Asher

My good friend and brother, Pat Donahue, authored an article titled *The Two Types of Mental Divorce* for the July 2003 issue of *Faith & Facts*. In this article Pat took a bold stand against an error that is getting a hold in some quarters. He is to be commended, and I want to add my voice in opposition to the error being promoted. The divorce evil is overrunning the church in some places and too many preachers are unwilling to oppose the advocates of error for fear of sacrificing popularity and pay. However, one need not “run past Jerusalem to Jericho” in order to oppose error. I believe this is what Pat has done with respect to what he identifies as “Mental Divorce Type II.”

Mental Divorce Type I

The position advocated by Ron Halbrook and others is an old one. I was taught it when I was a youth under the influence of some of the same men that have influenced Ron. It is a doctrine “very full of comfort” because it allows an apparent injustice to be “righted.” The Halbrook doctrine allows a spouse put away for no cause or any cause, other than fornication, to remarry after the former spouse’s subsequent adultery by “mentally” putting that former spouse away. This “mental divorce” is defined by its advocates as a “moral and spiritual act.” It is certainly not an actual and legal act since according to law, custom and Scripture there is no marriage.

Pat is right on target when he points out that the remarriage of a person having been so divorced constitutes adultery per Luke 16:18. The text says, “*Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.*” Both of the spouses and those whom they marry are guilty of adultery. This is the general marriage law which is true from the beginning (Matthew 19:3–6). Jesus made provision for one and only one exception to this rule—fornication.

In Matthew 5:32 Jesus states the exception to the general marriage law relative to the “innocent” spouse: “*But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*” Jesus assigns no blame to the spouse that divorces a fornicator. Such a one cannot “cause,” that is, “be the author of” (*Thayer*) adultery. This is apparent since it is the guilty spouse that has already committed the act. In this text Jesus specifies the only righteous “cause” or “motive” (*Strong*) authorizing a believer to obtain a divorce—the fornication of a spouse. This motive precipitated by a spouse’s sinful actions must be present at the time the divorce occurs or else both spouses commit adultery when they remarry. To seek a divorce without this motive makes one or both spouses party to a grievous sin (cf. Matthew 18:6–10; Mark 10:11–12).

Matthew 19:9 also states the exception to the general marriage law and includes instruction concerning the remarriage of the innocent spouse. Jesus said, “*And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*” Jesus is clear that all divorce, except that which is for the reason of

fornication, will result in adultery for all who remarry. In that case when the exception is present, the only one that may remarry without sin is the one who divorced having the cause of fornication. Notice the “her” of this text commits adultery, whether or not she is guilty of fornication, when she remarries. It is equivocation of the worst sort to dissect this verse and read it with two different definitions assigned to the words “put away” in order to justify the remarriage of a spouse that divorced for a reason other than fornication.

Halbrook and others confuse the legitimate *motive* of the divorcing spouse with the actual *legal procedure* for the divorce. If their position is true, then marriage has nothing at all to do with the requirements of civil law but is a matter initiated and ended upon a mental act. I am willing to grant that these brethren have taken this view for noble reasons. They want to hinder wicked persons from the treacherous behavior of divorcing the wife or guide of youth (Malachi 2:15–16; Proverbs 2:17). However, it is not true because Luke 16:18 et. al. affirm that one can divorce for unlawful reasons and so sin against a faithful saint leaving them in a condition where to marry is to commit adultery. This is not fair; it is unjust and cruel, however, it is just one of many things that the wicked may do to the righteous (cf. 1 Peter 4:14–16). We have not helped the suffering saint by arranging a “loop hole” in Scripture that will lead them into adultery.

Mental Divorce Type II

One of the charges being brought against those opposing the Halbrook doctrine is that we reduce a scriptural divorce to a “race for the court house.” I have certainly objected to that characterization and deny that it is the case. However, I am finding that some of my brethren really do believe that the scripturalness of a divorce, in some cases, depends on who files the divorce petition. Pat is among those who so believe. This is where he and I part company.

This difference between us is serious. In opposing Halbrook and others both Pat and I recognize that they are loosing a matter that God has bound (cf. Matthew 16:19). Jesus specifically told men not to attempt to put asunder what God had joined (Matthew 19:6). In that Halbrook says that some may marry with impunity when God has said they commit adultery, he is encouraging men to commit sin (cf. 2 Peter 2:18). While he no doubt believes he is right, the best I can say is that he is deceived while deceiving others (2 Timothy 3:13). However, Pat is in no better situation. He is in the unenviable position of binding what God has loosed. Like the sect of the circumcision in the early church, Pat would deny some their liberty (Galatians 2:14). Jesus has said that one who divorces having as a motive the fornication of an unfaithful spouse may do so and remarry without sin. It is my duty to oppose those who would take away a brother’s liberty as ardously as I oppose those that encourage sin (Galatians 2:5).

In the original article Pat objected to this position taken by Harry Osborne: “I believe the vast majority would also affirm that an innocent party in a marriage sundered for the cause of fornication has the right to remarry even if the guilty fornicator filed first and secured the civil divorce...” Harry’s position is clearly in favor of a spouse who has a scriptural motive obtaining an actual civil divorce regardless of the precise procedure civil authority follows.

In order to be sure I understood Pat I wrote and asked:

“My point (or maybe it is a question) is this, it seems to me that while an innocent party may not have initiated the legal proceeding, if fornication has occurred and the innocent one is confident that it has, that innocent one may consent to a divorce initiated by an unfaithful spouse and still have ‘put away’ as the Scriptures teach ‘for the cause of fornication.’”

In his reply Pat stated,

“If, however, the guilty man **files first** and the innocent woman just consents to (goes along with) **HIS** divorce, **then she is the put away person, and may not remarry without sin**. Not only that, but she has sinned by going along with an unscriptural action (2 John 9–10).”

I think it is apparent that Pat makes the individual who has a scriptural motive guilty of sin because he did not win the foot race to the court house. Now, let’s consider why he is in error on this point.

The Realities of No Fault Divorce

Most states, including Texas, have adopted what are called “no fault divorce statutes” in addition to the traditional “fault” divorce statutes. Fifteen states have only “no fault” divorce. Ohio is the only state that will not grant a no fault divorce if one of the petitioners contests the grounds of incompatibility and insupportability. A breakdown of which states have either or both may be obtained by visiting the law encyclopedia located at the following website: <http://www.nolo.com> (search for “no fault divorce”). In Texas it is impossible to stop a “no fault divorce” because the courts have adopted a very liberal view for granting divorce on the grounds of insupportability. The objection to the divorce by one party is viewed by the court as an irreconcilable difference and, therefore, grounds for the divorce. It is possible that a Christian may be unwillingly compelled to appear before a judge in a divorce proceeding over which he has no control of the outcome.

Now, Pat insists that the innocent spouse must either file for a “fault” divorce on the grounds of adultery and win as a “plaintiff” or be first to file as “petitioner” in a “no fault” divorce. This is what Pat said in our correspondence:

“First, it is not who files first, but who actually gets the divorce. In our society (and legal system), that would have to do with who is the plaintiff, who is the defendant, and who the judge grants the divorce to.

“If the guilty (man) files first and the innocent (woman) counter sues and wins, then she has put away her husband for fornication, and may remarry without sin. He tried to divorce her, but he failed to accomplish the task.

“In our society (Romans 13:1, I Peter 2:13), that is how it is determined who gets the divorce and who is the put away party. One must put away in order to put away.

”The word ‘fornication’ doesn't necessarily have to be on the official divorce paper. In a no fault divorce State (where you don't tell the reason), the reason would be what is truly in the mind of the one doing the putting away. Who gets the divorce is not a mental thing; the reason is mental.

“If however the guilty (man) files first and the innocent (woman) just consents to (goes along with) HIS divorce, then she is the put away person, and may not remarry without sin. Not only that, but she has sinned by going along with an unscriptural action (II John verses 10-11).”

It is apparent that Pat makes much of who gets there first at least in the “no fault” divorce situation. Furthermore, he makes the particular state the arbiter of who can get a scriptural divorce on procedural grounds not moral and spiritual ones. In his scenario a woman who knows her husband is a fornicator cannot divorce him because he has beat her to the courthouse and petitioned for a “no fault” divorce. She does not want a “no fault” divorce—the state says she must. She protests she does not want to be divorced—the judge grants the divorce because her husband wants one. She insists her husband is an adulterer—the judge grants the divorce because of irreconcilable differences.

Why must she be the petitioner? Why must she be the plaintiff and win? In order just to please some brethren? What did Jesus require in order for a spouse to divorce and remarry? He required the *motive—for the cause of fornication*—in order to divorce and remarry. Jesus did not require a particular legal procedure with designations of “plaintiff” or “petitioner”.

Mental Divorce Type II is Fiction

Those that divorce according to the “no fault” divorce statutes having “*the cause of fornication,*” that is, they actually possess as their motive consent to a divorce because their spouse has committed fornication, have not violated any precept of Scripture. This must be the case because (1) their spouse was guilty of fornication at the time they appeared before a judge seeking a divorce decree, (2) they consented to the divorce having their own scriptural motive and not because they were compelled to do so on the basis of an unscriptural one, and (3) they are not justifying their remarriage on the basis of a mental act after the fact of an actual legal civil divorce.

Pat’s objections are without scriptural merit or factual basis. He ignores the realities of the system under which we live and demands of his brethren that which cannot be achieved. He forbids those whom God has said may marry their liberty and exalts a human system above the divine. Furthermore, Pat’s objections to this non-existent evil hinders his effectiveness in opposing a real evil by giving to the enemies of truth an advantage by which they shift the focus of the debate from themselves to his irrational conclusions. It is my prayer that Pat will see his error and return to solid ground whereupon we both can contend earnestly with those that would promote the sin of adultery.

Response to Jeff Asher concerning “The Two Types Of Mental Divorce”

I appreciate my friend Jeff Asher loving me (and all those who might agree with me) enough to reply to my article “The Two Types Of Mental Divorce” and correct what he perceives to be error. This speaks well of Jeff, and judges those who let brotherhood politics preclude them from doing likewise. The kind attitude demonstrated in Jeff’s article shows that Christian brothers can disagree without getting ugly with one another. Only good can come from such exchanges.

I am glad that Jeff agrees with me on the first “type” of mental divorce. He and I can join hands in opposing the doctrine that a woman may remarry after her husband unscripturally divorces her and remarries. However Jeff thinks I go too far by also condemning this same woman’s remarriage if the man’s fornication occurs before his divorce of her. In reading Jeff’s reasons for his opposition, I conclude that Jeff is emphasizing one of God’s requirements to the exclusion of another. The Baptists do this when they emphasize belief to the exclusion of baptism in Mark 16:16. Jeff does the same on this MDR issue when he emphasizes the motive for the divorce to the exclusion of who actually gets the divorce. Jesus made both important. Matthew 19:9a reads “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” The implication is that if a man puts away his scriptural wife for fornication and marries another, he does not (necessarily) commit adultery. Jeff correctly emphasizes the “for fornication” part, but incorrectly neglects the part about the “innocent” being the one who did the putting away. According to Matthew 19:9a, for a man to remarry without committing adultery, three conditions would have to be true:

1. his wife must commit fornication against him
2. he must divorce his wife
3. his divorce must be “for fornication”

Jeff’s position leaves off the second requirement just as surely as the Baptist leaves off the second requirement in Mark 16:16.

A closer look at Luke 16:18 reveals this same “second” requirement. It reads “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” As I pointed out in my first article, the woman in the ‘b’ part of the verse commits adultery when she remarries even though her former husband is by that time committing adultery against her. At that point she has the scriptural cause, and so according to Jeff’s emphasis on the cause only, she ought to be able to remarry. But Jeff agrees with me that the text says she can’t. So it must not only matter what the motive of the divorce is, it must also matter who gets the divorce. That is the one thing keeping the woman of Luke 16:18b from being able to remarry, the fact that she is not the one who actually got the divorce.

In reply to Jeff bringing up “circumstances” (no fault divorce) to help sustain his position, I remind him that the careful Bible student lets the text mean what it says (regardless of situations), and then draws proper applications from that. We shouldn’t let

scenarios drive our understanding of the texts. That is getting the cart before the horse. If that were the proper course, then the Baptists are right that the possible circumstance of a man dieing on the way to the baptistery would prove that Jesus was wrong when he required a man to be baptized to be saved. I repeat what I said before, if you are a woman and your husband is divorcing you for a reason other than fornication (in a no fault state, or a fault state), if you agree to the divorce (for whatever reason), you sin by being a party to an unscriptural/sinful divorce (II John vs.10-11). It is always wrong to “consent” to sin (Acts 8:1). No reason can justify it.

I differ with Jeff that my position will aid the cause of Halbrook, Warnock, and other false teachers on this issue. The last thing we want to do is apologize for Jesus because He taught that it matters who actually obtains the divorce. In actuality, Jeff’s position is the one who aids the more extreme “mental divorcers,” because once someone is taught that it doesn’t really matter who gets the divorce, then guess where they will run to next?

And Jeff relies upon the same argument that the more extreme “mental divorcers” always make, that is, Pat’s position makes God’s law on divorce dependent upon a “foot race to the court house.” Let me address that with an humorous illustration. Suppose a young couple who were “shacked up” together were arguing with Jeff because he told them they needed to get married. They might argue, “Jeff, your position makes God’s law on marriage a race to the courthouse. Suppose two brothers wanted to marry the same young lady, and being kind of fickle, she was willing to marry either one. The first brother to get her to the courthouse and the I do’s would be married to her according to your position, right?” I wonder how Jeff would respond to this argument? The truth is that divorce is the opposite of getting married, and if the latter involves the legal (in our society), why is it so hard to understand that the former would also involve the legal? If God requires a person to divorce their spouse for fornication to be able to remarry, then God requires just that. The first one to put the other away becomes the divorcer; the one put away becomes the put away person. And the put away person is forbidden from remarriage.

Jesus told us three times “whoever marries the put away woman commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32b, 19:9b, Luke 16:18b). Jesus makes a big difference between the person doing the putting away and the person being put away. Jeff doesn’t. When George Foreman knocked out Joe Frazier, there was a big difference between who delivered the punch and who received the punch. Just ask Mr. Frazier. The same is true about the difference between who does the putting away and who is being put away. It is impossible to divorce someone for fornication if you are not the one doing the divorcing in the first place. That should be obvious.