

On December 10th, 2014, I sent out the article "*The 'Truth' Commentary on Matthew – A Warning (Ezk. 3:21)*" along with a power point slide show to brother Kyle Pope before I sent it out to others. I then attached and sent both materials out to other members of the church in various mailing groups. In one of those groups, brother Pope was included.

Brother Pope began this exchange with the mailing group of approximately ninety brethren, in which he was included. – *Jeff*

Email Exchange: Kyle Pope & Jeff Belknap

Sent: Wednesday, December 10, 2014 4:20 PM

Dear Brother Belknap,

I received the e-mail that you sent out to me and (it seems) to other brethren regarding your concerns about statements I made in my commentary on Matthew. I wish that you would have approached me about this before you chose to distribute this to others. The principle outlined in Scripture for action (at least on a congregational level) is that one brother who feels another is at fault is to **"go and tell him his fault between you and him alone"** (Matt. 18:15). Perhaps you felt that since we are not members of the same congregation this did not apply, but even so if you had done this it would have provided the opportunity to make certain that there was no misunderstanding. Proverbs 18:13 teaches, **"He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him."** I recognize, however, that my work is a matter of public teaching so perhaps you felt that since it is public in nature your response to it should be public in nature even before you talked to me. As your brother in Christ, I wish you hadn't done that, and I don't believe this is the loving and considerate thing to do. Jesus taught, **"Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."** (Matt. 7:12). But I imagine that if you believed that I am in fact planting seeds of error, you felt that your obligation was to expose it (Eph. 5:11), so in spite of how offensive this is to me personally I hope that I can clarify some misconceptions you have about my statements.

First, I do not believe in so-called "Mental Divorce" and my comments regarding the differences between modern attitudes toward divorce and biblical concepts are actually intended to oppose the kind of thinking that would lead in that direction. The Bible clearly teaches that remarriage for anyone who has been "put away" constitutes adultery. It is not that two people can divorce and then wait until one or the other either has sexual relations or remarries that the other party can simply say to themselves "Now I put you away for fornication!" That does not match the wording of either Matthew 5:32 or 19:9.

Second, I would ask you to recognize that the comments that you addressed from the appendix of the commentary come in a broader consideration of historical attempts to "Redefine Marriage." As our country confronts the growing threat of a civil government that is rapidly moving towards calling illicit homosexual relationships "marriage" it raises a number of questions regarding what they have already done by sanctioning adulterous heterosexual remarriages. The fact is that the late 19th and 20th centuries brought to America (and much of the world) a surrendering to civil government the right to define (and license) marriage and divorce in ways it had not possessed throughout much of human history. My references to our obligation to obey civil law (e.g. Rom. 13:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:13-17) balanced with the responsibility to obey God over man (Acts 5:29) are not intended to imply that we can disregard civil law and mentally "put away" someone after a divorce has occurred. I do believe, however, that we must begin seriously to think about the limits Scripture must outline for exactly what the government can and cannot do in this regard.

Let illustrate this with a few examples. I know of a situation in a foreign country in which the influence of the Catholic Church is so strong on the civil government that a non-Catholic citizen who might wish to "put-away" a mate for fornication could not do so unless they paid the equivalent of a year's salary! What is such a person to

do? I know of another situation in a different country in which divorce is prohibited under any circumstances. What is a woman to do whose husband becomes either a polygamist or maintains a sexual affair on the side? In yet another country, I am aware of a case in which a husband has committed fornication through the twisted and sick behavior of sexual molestation of children. Under Christ, his wife would have the right to "put away" her husband. In her country, however, unless he is criminally convicted and the evidence can be sufficient to put him in prison she will not be allowed to divorce him. What are her rights and obligations before God?

Now please understand, I am not saying that certain situations ever allow us to violate the will of God. What I am saying is that in matters of marriage and divorce in biblical times these actions were matters concerning a private contract between two parties—they were not relationships the civil government presumed to allow or disallow. The move in modern times on the part of civil government to presume the right to permit, define, re-define, and license these things raises some difficult challenges to those interested in following God's word. Obviously, Scripture teaches that we can follow God's instructions on these matters, I simply believe that we must be careful not to set man-made criteria that God has not set.

Finally, I don't know very much about some of your past interactions with brother Willis and brother Halbrook, but I got the distinct impression from what you wrote that what you saw in my words was colored by debates or discussions you have had with them in the past. Please understand, I love both of those brethren but what I wrote was what I believe. I am sure that they would not say that they look at every single thing exactly the way that I do. By the same token while I believe and want to sincerely follow every word of Scripture, I probably do not look at every single thing exactly the way that they do. It is unfortunate that your first contact with me had to be the kind of thing in which you assumed certain things about me and my words and intentions which may or may not be accurate.

It is certainly my hope and prayer that the words I have written in the commentary do not sow seeds of error or any leaven that fuels falsehood. I affirm to you that my aim and intention in every word I wrote on marriage, divorce, and re-marriage was to urge people to honor the "one-man-one-woman-for-life" covenant that God intended for man (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6). My aim was to uphold the Lord's teaching that fornication is the sole cause for "putting away" a mate (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). This right to "put away" a mate who commits fornication is accessible to one while a binding covenant is in place, not after it has already been severed (cf. Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). Any questions that we may have regarding the government's role in such things do not change these fundamental truths, and it was not my intention in any way to suggest that they do.

In Christ
Kyle Pope
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Sent: Thursday, December 11, 2014 8:22 AM

Dear Brother Pope,

Matthew 18:15 reveals the process for private sins, not public. Public sins are to be dealt with publically. Since it was your public teaching that I responded to, Proverbs 18:13 is not applicable, whereas Galatians 2:11-14 is. This is why I sent the materials to you *first*, then to others shortly thereafter.

Since eternal souls are at stake, I feel that my approach was the most loving (and considerate) thing that I could have possibly done. At this point, I am most concerned with the souls who will be influenced by your public

teaching, although I am also concerned for your soul as well. If I ever publicly teach error, I hope that you would correct me in the same venue as soon as possible. As a result, I have only practiced Matthew 7:12.

Your statement “*I do believe, however, that we must begin seriously to think about the limits Scripture must outline for exactly what the government **can** and **cannot** do in this regard*” (i.e. facilitate a sinful divorce) is why your teaching is diametrically opposed to the *Truth*. In your statement, you are denying the fact that I stated in my article: “*In the first century, when the New Testament was written, man was able to unjustly divorce using the laws of that time, just as man does today.*”

I also feel that it is unfortunate that my first knowledge of you was to read the false doctrine that you included in the *Truth* commentary. To deny that a **man** can sinfully divorce his marriage partner (because civil law allows and grants it, contrary to God’s will) is false doctrine plain and simple (cf. O.T. & N.T):

Mal. 2:14-16, “Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, **AGAINST WHOM THOU HAST DEALT TREACHEROUSLY: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of THY COVENANT.** 15 And **DID NOT HE MAKE ONE?** Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore **TAKE HEED TO YOUR SPIRIT, and LET NONE DEAL TREACHEROUSLY AGAINST THE WIFE OF HIS YOUTH.** 16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that **HE HATETH PUTTING AWAY:** for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore **TAKE HEED** to your spirit, **THAT YE DEAL NOT TREACHEROUSLY.** 17 Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, **EVERY ONE THAT DOETH EVIL** is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?” **Cf. I Cor. 7:10-11**

Your denial that a spouse **can** be a covenant-breaker and sinfully put away their marriage partner (via whatever the society’s recognized procedure is) directly *contradicts* the teaching in Mal. 2:14-16; Mt. 5:32; 19:9; Lk. 16:18 and I Cor. 7:10-11. Since the days of the Old Testament, laws were followed for marriage as well as divorce!

You wrote, “*My aim was to uphold the Lord’s teaching that fornication is the sole cause for ‘putting away’ a mate (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). This right to ‘put away’ a mate who commits fornication is accessible to one while a binding covenant is in place, not after it has already been severed (cf. Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18).*” All those who teach the *second* “putting away” say the same thing. However, they do not all refer to marriage as “*a binding covenant.*” It is amazing to me how so many will use unscriptural terms in their teaching instead of obeying the command to “speak as the oracles of God” (I Pet. 4:11).

Although you question civil authority, you never *specified* what procedure is capable of “putting away” one who is *innocent of fornication* and thus, breaking the “*binding covenant.*” If you write back, please be sure and include this information. If you believe that an “innocent” person who does not want to be divorced **CAN** be sinfully put away against their will (and thus **un**married) via society’s existing protocol, then what is the point behind your extended discussion about what the civil government “*can and cannot do in this regard?*”

Individuals make a covenant (vow) before God and their spouse to be faithful unto death, and God requires them to keep their word. However, as in all sins, one can violate their promises. They are called “covenant-breakers” (Rom. 1:31). Did not the Israelites sinfully break their covenant with God (Heb. 8:9)?

Finally, is what you call the “*binding covenant*” still in place *after* a mean, ungodly husband has used the heathen courts of men to sinfully divorce his sweet, innocent, godly wife against her will – or do you believe it

remains intact at that point? **I am asking you to be upfront and absolutely honest with this answer, not misleading.**

Obviously, what you call “*mental divorce*” and what most understand it to mean are two different things. Once man has divorced his wife (regardless of the reason or accepted means), the physical marriage has been put asunder! Any (*second*) “procedure” following this, would be **nothing more than** a “*mental divorce*,” for it is not actual in any sense of “the Word.”

Sincerely,
Jeff

Sent: Thursday, December 11, 2014 11:29 AM

Dear Brother Belknap,

I appreciate that in your mind you were seeking to obey God and demonstrate a love for souls, as I tried to acknowledge in my previous e-mail. I have tried to assume the best about you, even though from my perspective yours is not the approach I would have taken. It is certainly possible that I may be ignorant or misguided but please assume the best about me also—I will not attempt to "mislead" you or anyone else who has concerns about this matter.

I truly believe that you are reading much more into my words in the commentary than I either stated or believe. There is far more about which you and I agree in this matter than there is over which we might either disagree or simply word something a little differently. Absolutely! A man or woman today, as in biblical times can sinfully "put away" a mate for a cause other than fornication. If you have interpreted anything I said in the text to teach otherwise you have either misinterpreted my words or I stated them in a manner that was unclear.

As to the issue of what procedure constitutes "putting away" here is where some of the difficulty arises. When Scripture addresses this matter what does it say? Under Mosaic Law a man wrote a bill of divorcement and gave it to his wife and sent her from his house (Deut. 24:1). When that happened they were divorced—a binding covenant was no longer in place. Is that what constitutes a "put away" condition today? Not according to current civil law. You have probably studied this before, but here is an interesting article taken from *West's Encyclopedia of American Law* on the subject of "Divorce": <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/divorce> It shows the changing, confusing, and often contradictory nature of this issue from a legal standpoint. There were times in early colonial history in which a divorce could not be granted without the approval of the king! Move ahead to our time and you have "no-fault" divorce becoming the norm. In some states divorce is final with the signatures of both parties. In others only one is required. What a confusing and pitiful mess! If the divorce of Malachi's day brought hatred for it on the part of the Lord for the treacherous treatment it allowed, what must He think of our wicked generation!

Now, I am not saying that we can disregard our obligation to follow civil law. Nor am I saying that a civil law that grants the right to sinfully divorce somehow justifies a "second putting away." What I am saying is that as Christians, while we call people to absolute obedience to God's word, we must recognize that the increased intrusion of civil government into what Scripture addressed as a private contractual relationship raises some challenging issues that ultimately will only be answered by God's judgment of the conscience and actions of men and women. How do we wade through this confusion? Honor our covenants! Don't break them and then try to figure out ways to get around our dishonesty! When two people are divorced for a cause other than

fornication, if they remarry it is adultery! We are in agreement on that brother. I am sorry if you felt my words in the commentary in any way encouraged anything else. I pray to God this will not be the case.

Sincerely
Kyle Pope
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Sent: Thursday, December 11, 2014 9:12 PM

Dear Brother Pope,

Thank you for your reply. I appreciate your pledge that *"I will not attempt to 'mislead' you or anyone else who has concerns about this matter."*

So then, let's openly address the actual issue of concern. (Discussing Deuteronomy 24, interesting articles within *Encyclopedias*, colonial history, *"'no-fault' divorce becoming the norm"* and issues that we agree on are not relevant to the subject at hand.)

Regarding your affirmation: *"Absolutely! A man or woman today, as in biblical times can sinfully 'put away' a mate for a cause other than fornication."*

Please clarify the following question with a "yes" or "no" answer: Do you agree that in ***all sinful divorces, all*** who have been "put away" by their mate (via civil law) must become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake for the rest of their lives, with ONLY two exceptions: 1) that their original partner dies, or 2) the original partner agrees to reconcile? [This question necessarily infers that there is *nothing* the "put away" can do to alter their requirement to remain a eunuch, even if their original partner commits post-(civil)-divorce fornication.]

I can and do answer this question with a resounding "yes!" If you also answer the question with a "yes," I will be glad, but would then ask, what is the point behind all the discussion of *"what the government can and cannot do in this regard?"* And why would you not have expressed that simple truth expressed above within your commentary?

However, if you answer the aforementioned question with a "no," then please specify which scenario(s) do not apply to it, and we can discuss this also.

Brotherly,
Jeff

Sent: Thursday, December 11, 2014 9:40 PM

Brother Belknap,

I would answer your question "yes." I might add a slight caveat, however, let's say that one mate has committed adultery but is the first to file for and secure a divorce. If civil law is what determines whether one has actually "put away" another we would have to say that the innocent party in such a situation was actually the "put away" spouse. I have some trouble with that position. Or, let's say that (as I mentioned in one of my previous e-mails) a Christian lives in a country in which it is impossible to secure a divorce by civil law. Is a Christian man or woman whose mate has been guilty of fornication forbidden from "putting away" an adulterous mate because

they cannot secure a civil divorce? I would have some trouble with that position also. I suppose that my consideration of changes in the government's role and what it can and cannot do is aimed at considering these kind of issues. I by no means wish to open any doors to those who would look for excuses or rationalizations that would make them believe they can violate God's laws because of the complex and confusing nature of civil law. I pray to God that nothing in the words that I have written may ever have that result!

Sincerely
Kyle Pope
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Sent: Friday, December 12, 2014 10:42 PM

Dear Brother Pope,

Thank you for your prompt reply. By sharing with us some of the situations that are causing you “*trouble*,” you have reinforced why I stated in the beginning of my article that your “teaching is highly suggestive of the original definition of mental divorce (a *second* ‘putting away’),” and that it “paves the way for adulterous remarriages.” Jesus taught us, “*for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*” (Mt. 12:34).

You may not be trying to *mislead* others in your teaching, yet I believe you have actually been deceiving yourself. You answered “yes” to my question of whether you agree that in “**all sinful divorces, all** who have been ‘put away’ by their mate (via civil law) must become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake for the rest of their lives...” Yet contrarily, you then expressed your “*trouble*” with different “*situations*” (your two caveats), and “*these kind of issues*.” I am certain that any sinful divorce is troubling to you as it is to me. Yet you have a different kind of “*trouble*” over the scenarios you expressed as caveats. Therefore, the necessary conclusion that can be drawn from your reply is that *your answer is really “no”* because you **do not believe** (with full assurance of faith) that “**all**” who have been put away in “**all sinful divorces**” (via civil law) must become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake for the rest of their lives...”

It is apparent by your initial answer of “yes” that you recognize that the statement in question expressed the truth. Therefore, if you agree that scripture teaches that man (via applicable civil/societal law) can indeed sinfully put away an innocent spouse, what biblical teaching can be cited to support the idea that it is *not* possible for a man who is guilty of adultery, to sinfully put away their innocent spouse (via applicable civil/societal law)?

Jesus did not reveal any *other* exceptions to His rule regarding the need for put away people to remain eunuchs than the ones that were cited in my previous e-mail: “1) that their original partner dies, or 2) the original partner agrees to reconcile.” We have no authority to **think** beyond what is written (I Cor. 4:6; II Cor. 10:5). Doubt/“trouble” is the opposite of faith, and *faith* can only come by the word of God (Rom. 10:17)!

Your unsupported “caveats” to what you recognize is truth, manifest a “*wavering*” faith that can be influenced by emotion and circumstance. Yet, James warns us that “*A double minded man is unstable in all of his ways*” (Jas. 1:8; cf. 4:8). You know what is right, but because of the ungodly injustices of this world, you have displaced the blame for a sinful divorce from the responsible spouse (whom God says divorces his mate) – to the government that merely grants his petition. Consequently, you are questioning whether man can *really do* what God clearly taught man *can* do (sinfully put away his spouse), because the civil government (who grants the man’s divorce petition) is unjust. Such reasoning manifests a *lack of faith* in the strait and narrow (restricted and difficult) way of the Lord (Mt. 7:13-14).

Guns don't kill people, pencils don't misspell words, forks don't make people fat and governments don't divorce people. It is a spouse who sinfully divorces – and God confirms that it is possible for him to accomplish it. It is not possible for man to accomplish a sinful divorce in one scenario and yet have no power to accomplish it in *another*.

By examining your first “*caveat*” you will see why I say that your teaching “paves the way for adulterous remarriages.”

In Caveat No. 1) You wrote, “I might add a slight caveat, however, let’s say that one mate has committed adultery but is the first to file for and **secure a divorce**. **If civil law is what determines whether one has actually ‘put away’ another we would have to say that the innocent party in such a situation was actually the ‘put away’ spouse**. I have some trouble with that position.”

First of all, I do not believe that this caveat is “*slight*.” It speaks volumes. There is no “*if*” when it comes to *the standard* protocol of putting away. The “*innocent party*” is in fact (“*actually*”) put away by their spouse, whenever the civil / societal law has granted their petition! If you do not totally believe that, you cannot **honestly** answer “yes” to my question which included “**civil law**” as the standard by which all are put away.

Obviously, if “*the innocent party*” had *known* of their partner’s previous immorality during the marriage, they could have endeavored to counter-sue or issue an addendum to the divorce decree. But be that as it may, if one was in fact sinfully put away as you articulated in the “*situation*” stated above, then how could anyone suggest that they may *not* really be put away? And what scripture would you use to prove that this sinful divorce *cannot* cause an innocent mate to be put away, while other sinful divorces *can* cause “*the innocent*” to be put away?

There are no secondary “putting away” options in scripture for people who have already been put away by ungodly mates! Bad things can happen to people in this life which cause them to suffer for the rest of their lives. Yet through Christ, we can do whatever God would have us to do (Phil. 4:13) and overcome any and every evil thing that comes our way (I Cor. 10:13; I Jn. 5:4). Whatever we suffer in this life, heaven will surely be worth it all.

I personally know a brother who was *sinfully* divorced by his wife and therefore remained single for years. Then his original “wife” was killed in a car accident. Now he has remarried and God has blessed him with offspring. I know of *others* who are faithfully remaining single to this day. Your scenarios would have us *question* that only *some* who are sinfully put away are required to remain eunuchs, while others would *possibly* be allowed to exercise some *unrevealed* “procedure” and thus be able to remarry another? Yet no passage can be cited to justify any additional allowances. This *possibility* permeates your commentary writing as it relates to divorce.

Secondly, if you “*have some trouble with that position*,” exactly what option would “*the innocent party*” be able to take **after** they were put away? Leaving the impression that there may be additional options (outside of what scripture reveals), not only opens the door to a (unnamed) second “putting away,” but also leads to *the logical conclusion* that it “paves the way for adulterous remarriages.”

In Caveat No. 2) You wrote, “Or, let’s say that (as I mentioned in one of my previous e-mails) a Christian lives in a country in which it is impossible to secure a divorce by civil law. Is a Christian man or woman whose mate has been guilty of fornication forbidden from ‘putting away’ an adulterous mate because they cannot secure a civil divorce? I would have some trouble with that position also.”

The quotes I cited from your commentary do not relate to such an issue but instead, you addressed “*Current conditions in the United States*,” “*no fault divorces*,” *etc.* Nevertheless, the only authority we have to disobey civil government is when in obeying it, it would require us to disobey God.

While God indeed gives *permission* for a married mate to divorce their spouse for the cause of fornication, He does *not require* it. Thus, it is not a lack of respect for God's word when we obey civil authorities even when they would deny us God-given rights, because to avail ourselves of our liberty in that case, would actually require us to violate God's command in Romans 13. If PETA members took over the government and outlawed the eating of meat, would God have us to disobey civil law (which He requires we obey) so we can exercise our God-given *liberties*? Or would He have us to forego those liberties, as Paul instructed in I Corinthians 8? If Christians were required to forgo this liberty to protect a brother's conscience, should they not also be willing to forgo it if it would require them to directly violate another command of the Lord (Rom. 13:1-3; Cf. 12:17; II Cor. 8:21)?

Last of all you wrote, *"I suppose that my consideration of changes in the government's role and what it can and cannot do is aimed at considering these kind of issues. I by no means wish to open any doors to those who would look for excuses or rationalizations that would make them believe they can violate God's laws because of the complex and confusing nature of civil law. I pray to God that nothing in the words that I have written may ever have that result!"*

Brother Pope, I believe you when you say, *"I by no means wish to open any doors to those who would look for excuses or rationalizations that would make them believe they can violate God's laws."* However, that is the logical end ("*result*") to your repeated questioning of the authority of civil law to define what constitutes putting away, and to when one is *"actually 'put away.'"*

The Bible teaches that it is a man (or woman) who puts away their spouse, whether sinfully or lawfully. Though they use whatever means is required by their society to make it official, it is still the individual who God says does it. Regardless of whether you believe the civil law (which grants his/her petition) to be complex, confusing, or too permissive, it is a moot point if you truly believe what the Bible says.

Brother Kyle, whether you realize it or not, the publishing of your doubts and misplaced troubles leads your commentary readers to the logical conclusion that I (and others) have made. Sadly, a commentary should serve to clarify the doubts of the reader; not add to them.

When we acknowledge the truth of God's word, we must be willing to cast off all of our doubts and fears and embrace it with all our being, without any *"ands," "buts"* or *"maybes."* I will be praying for you (Phil. 3:14-15).

In Him,
Jeff

Sent: Saturday, December 13, 2014 9:34 AM

Dear Brother Belknap,

I will certainly consider the points that you have raised and I appreciate your willingness to go to God in prayer on my behalf. I too will pray for you. I believe you are sincere in your concerns but I pray that the approach that you take in this does not do more harm to the cause of truth in Christ than it does good. While you and I may be used to digging into fine points of doctrine such as this, some people find public discussions such as this so distasteful that it raises doubt, or makes them unwilling to even look very close at Scripture at all. Let's pray that is not the result of our exchange. It is certainly possible that we as Christians can deceive ourselves in our understanding of God's word. I hope that this is not what I have done and I pray that it will not be what you do either.

Since I first began preaching it has become clear to me that anyone who writes on the subject of Marriage-Divorce-and-Remarriage steps into a "mine field" of potential criticism and analysis of every word that they write. That is to be expected. Certainly, teachers face a "stricter judgment" (James 3:1), But also, as you have mentioned several times, the consequences of falsehood on this subject could allow people to imagine that they are secure in a state that the Lord defines as "adultery." I share with you the desire to avoid this result in the lives of any who hear or read my teaching.

In the commentary on Matthew I tried not to "shy away" from exposing error on this subject. In the appendix I wrote extensively about divorce as an alteration and perversion of God's original plan for marriage (pp. 1165-70). I articulated opposition to the view that claims the non-Christian is not amenable to the Law of Christ (pp. 153-4; 447; 615-19). I addressed that repentance forbids remaining in an unlawful marriage relationship (pp. 447; 607-8; 616-19). I articulated opposition to the view that baptism "washes away" adulterous marriages (p. 617). I even explained that in the second century most Christians opposed "second marriages" in general, in spite of the exception clause (p. 619, 621), as a challenge for us not to focus on the exception to the exclusion of the rule of honoring our marriage covenants. I articulated opposition to claiming that post-"putting-away" fornication meets the biblical instructions (pp. 156-7). I explained that "putting-away" in Scripture was (and is) a sinful act taken by one party against another (pp. 154; 601; 613). I articulated opposition to the view that the phrase "commits adultery" refers to a one-time act of covenant breaking rather than an on going state of sexual adultery (pp. 158-61; 614; 622). I articulated opposition to the view that Jesus' teaching on MDR was just a reinforcing of Mosaic Law (p. 611-12). I articulated opposition to what I consider to be a sinful notion of "mental divorce" (pp. 152; 614; 1170), although I recognize you see this matter much differently than I do. I touched on the sensitive and emotional issue of cases of abuse, but expressed that only temporary separation with a view toward reconciliation is allowed—not "putting-away" (pp. 622-23). I articulated that fornication is the sole cause, not only for "putting away" and remarriage, but for "putting-away" period (pp. 623-24). I also articulated that Jesus' teaching on MDR may demand in some cases that one live as a eunuch "for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (pp. 626-29). I even expressed the fact that as Christians we cannot ignore the role of civil government in recognizing marriage and divorce issues (pp. 154-5). Yet, I did challenge the reader to consider what was involved in marriage and divorce in ancient times as opposed to our modern conditions (pp. 154; 447; 609-11; 613-14; 620; 1162; 1167-70), calling people to recognize the degree to which man has often tried to presume control over marriage in ways God never authorized (pp. 1170-79). I would suspect on many of these things we would agree.

It is now clear to me, however, that you and I do not agree on a few important areas of this very serious issue. I will certainly continue to study this, but let me tell you brother that I fear you are taking the unsound position of elevating the laws of man over the laws of God and binding your judgments in areas where God has not spoken. It is God's law that defines marriage and it is God's law that defines the right to divorce. Certainly, it is the individual (not the government) that takes the sinful action involved in unscriptural divorce. We cannot ignore, however, that the simple private procedure of writing a certificate of divorce and sending a mate from one's house (as described in Scripture) has now been so completely taken over by the civil government that even many Christians treat this as if it is the government that allows, disallows, or even defines marriage. Where is the Scripture that gives them that right?

I realize that you feel that concerns I have raised about the government's role (in your mind) paves the way to adulterous relationships. I pray that it may never be so! What I am trying to consider, instead is the degree to which criteria imposed by man can limit actions that God authorizes? For example, let's think about marriage

itself. Is it a liberty to marry? Perhaps. If (as in the past) a government refused to recognize any marriages that were not conducted by the Catholic Church would Christians simply have to refrain from that liberty?

When it comes to the issue of the innocent party and who makes it to the court-house first, your position presumes that what God requires in order to "put away" a mate necessarily can be determined and defined by the laws of man. Now I am not taking the position some denominationalists do who refuse to get marriage licenses or divorce decrees issued by the state—all I really have done is say let's be careful how far we go with this. I fear that your position grants to human authorities the right to allow or disallow what God has authorized (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). This goes beyond what Scripture teaches and binds where God has not bound. Truth be known, I really come close to holding a rather "second-century" position in that I believe the safest thing is, if there is any question it is best to stay unmarried—either due to doubt or to allow for repentance and reconciliation. At the same time, I fear that we must avoid putting ourselves in a position of judging the conscience and actions of those who look at the same texts we do and wrestle with their responsibilities and restrictions Do we call them to obey God's word? Absolutely! We must "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2), but God will judge each man. God has not revealed the exact nature of a "putting-away" procedure and it is clear there is some judgment involved in determining where civil law can define exactly when this has happened. I don't believe that is "mental-divorce," I believe that is a recognition of what God has and has not said on the matter.

In spite of this, I say again as I said before, I still believe we agree on far more than the things on which we differ. I am sorry that you have concerns about my commentary. I say to you and to any who are "listening-in" on this very public correspondence we have had with each other—if you have specific concerns feel free to contact me and ask me about it. Let's drop this for now and both study on this further, and pray about it, but let the brethren who have read your note and our correspondence evaluate what has been said, understanding that it is the Lord that will judge each of us for what we have taught. Brother, we are both unworthy of His love, but I pray that both of us as we strive to (2 Pet. 3:18) when we come to the "throne of grace" may "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:6). Have a great weekend brother. I hope if we correspond in the future it may concern brighter things than these.

In Christ
Kyle Pope
kmpope@att.net

Sent: Saturday, December 13, 2014 4:57 PM

Dear Brother Pope,

Thank you for your response. I agree that enough has been said. We now *know* where we both stand. You wrote about this subject in your commentary, I responded to it, and then you submitted four letters to this exchange, therefore I will close after this, my fourth.

You wrote in your last letter, *"I believe you are sincere in your concerns but I pray that the approach that you take in this does not do more harm to the cause of truth in Christ than it does good. While you and I may be used to digging into fine points of doctrine such as this, some people find public discussions such as this so distasteful that it raises doubt, or makes them unwilling to even look very close at Scripture at all."*

Yet, If this is true, then Jesus and the apostle Paul must have erred on *numerous* occasions (I Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9). Notice what some said about Paul's *"approach"* in II Corinthians 10:10; 11:6 (cf. Matthew 15:12).

Moreover, after the aforementioned statement, you then proceeded to “*articulate*” the numerous MDR errors that you wrote against within your own commentary (which we both agree upon). Don’t you think it possible that those who hold to the doctrines that you exposed as error, would say something *similar* about your “approach”?

You wrote, “...let me tell you brother that I fear you are taking **the unsound position** of elevating the laws of man over the laws of God and binding your judgments in areas where God has not spoken.”

For my answer to that accusation, please refer to my last letter, in which I show scriptural evidence that it is **a marriage partner** – not “laws of man” – **who effects a sinful putting away**. Likewise, it cannot be said that recognizing a spouse’s ability to effect a sinful divorce against their innocent mate is elevating him or her over the laws of God, for it is God himself who teaches that it is a marriage partner who puts away (Mt. 19:6; I Cor. 7:10-11). Anyone with an honest heart can read those passages and clearly see that God *has indeed* spoken on this matter! Civil law has no place in a discussion of the validity of sinful putting away, for God taught the truth irrespective of it.

Consider your own inconsistencies throughout this exchange:

- In your *first* letter you *misapplied* Matthew 18:15; Proverbs 18:13 and Matthew 7:12 against me.
- In your *second* letter you wrote, “*I truly believe that you are reading much more into my words in the commentary than I either stated or believe.*” But now you say, “*It is now clear to me, however, that you and I do not agree on a few important areas of this very serious issue.*”
- In your *third* letter, you affirmed that that “*yes,*” you agree with my “*position*” (with “a slight caveat”), but in your *fourth*, you state that my position is “*unsound*” and is “*elevating the laws of man over the laws of God and binding...*”

Regarding your statement, “*It is God’s law that defines marriage and it is God’s law that defines the right to divorce,*” you have unfortunately missed the mark on this, as well. (This error is also taught in your commentary.)

Your statement neglects to consider that God (Jesus) is the very one who called the sinfully divorced person “put away,” and stated that whoever “*marrieth her who is put away doth commit adultery.*” PERIOD. God only reveals one scenario for putting away with His approval, and it is in the context of an intact *marriage* (*NOT an already sundered one*), when one of those (married) parties puts away for the cause of fornication (Mt. 19:6, 9; I Cor. 7:10-11). Advocating the ability for someone to employ an (unnamed) post-divorce “procedure” that would supposedly change one’s status from the sinfully “put away” person into the one who can later “put away for the cause of fornication,” is a *perversion* (II Pet. 3:16; cf. Gal. 1:6-9).

In reality, “*God’s law*” defines the difference between **“lawful”** and unlawful marriages and divorces. God’s “*law*” states in Mark 6:17-18, “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.** 18 For John had said unto Herod, **IT IS NOT LAWFUL FOR THEE TO HAVE THY BROTHER’S WIFE.**”

Note Romans 7:3, “So then if, while her husband liveth, she **BE MARRIED** to ANOTHER MAN, she shall be called an **adulteress**: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she **BE MARRIED** to another man.” **Similar language is also found in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18.**

Although it is true that, “*the simple private procedure of writing a certificate of divorce and sending a mate from one’s house*” was indeed “*described in Scripture,*” it was the prescribed procedure under *the theocratic, Mosaic law* (dispensation), which is now obsolete (See Mt. 19:7-12).

You also continued and wrote, “...many Christians treat this as if it is the government that allows, disallows, or even defines marriage. Where is the Scripture that gives them that right?”

Brother Pope, even while under *the government ruled by God* in the Old Testament (theocracy) which did not approve of sinful divorce, the word of God acknowledged that His own people **unlawfully** married and divorced against the Almighty’s will! God never said nor implied that those sinful actions were *not* “actual.”

Although their marriages were **unlawful**, God said that they had **sinfully** “*married*” and therefore had to put away their **unlawful** spouses to be acceptable before Him (Ezra 10). Moreover, His people (under His government) also treacherously (wrongfully) divorced their mates (Mal. 2:14-16). It all happened under God’s watch (i.e. His government). So it is clear that regardless of whether civil law *approves* of sinful divorce (as in today’s society), or *disapproves* of sinful divorce (as under the law of Moses), God affirms that spouses are *still* divorcing their mates against God’s will and causing their innocent, unwilling mates to be what He calls “put away.”

As you pointed out, my understanding of “mental divorce” is *different* than yours, and “**you and I do not agree on a few important areas of this very serious issue.**”

Yet my beliefs are simply based on Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b, 11-12; Luke 16:18b and I Cor. 7:10-11. How can an honest man deny the Lord’s words, “**and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery?**” It saddens me greatly that you have “*some trouble*” with this “*position*” in certain “*situations.*” (**Mental Divorce** allows for a *second* “putting away” *after the fact* of divorce. Period.)

All these differences reaffirm the reason I am duty-bound to warn my brethren (Ezk. 3:21).

As you concluded in your last response, “*Let’s drop this for now and both study on this further, and pray about it, but let the brethren who have read your note and our correspondence evaluate what has been said, understanding that it is the Lord that will judge each of us for what we have taught.*” I agree. Four letters each is “*fair and balanced.*”

Although you may criticize my “*approach,*” it is out of love for your soul and the souls of others that I have written what I have. I truly wish only the very best for them and for you.

Brotherly,
Jeff

For More Information Regarding The Role Of Civil Government See:

<http://www.mentaldivorce.com/mdrstudies/TheRoleOfCivilGovernmentInMarriageAndDivorce.htm>

Following is a post sent by one of the men receiving the e-mail exchange after it began. He is a brother I do not know.

Sent: Thursday, December 11, 2014 11:11 AM

Dear brethren,

I don't feel like I have the luxury of the time to make an exhaustive response to Kyle Pope's response to Jeff Belknap's comments on Kyle's Matthew commentary about divorce. (I imagine Jeff will exercise that prerogative and leave it to him to do so.) However, neither did I want to forward them without expressing my reaction.

For the most part, I confined myself to reading only the portions of Kyle's commentary high-lighted in Jeff's original message. My reading of Kyle's response to Jeff was word-for-word, or virtually so. If there was something in the context of Kyle's Matthew commentary which could have overturned Jeff's interpretation of it (as suggestive of the possibility of "mental divorce"), Kyle has now had the opportunity to point it out, and he failed to do so. Therefore, Jeff's assessment that Kyle's comments are "highly suggestive" of "mental divorce" remains credible.

First, Kyle's complaint, with the citation of Matt. 18:15-17, that Jeff should have first approached him with his concerns before going public with his warning is inapt. While there was nothing forbidding Jeff from doing so, neither was there anything requiring him to do so. Matt. 18:15-17 is referring to a private sin (as shown by the fact that "witnesses" to establish the facts are called for in the second and third steps). A published book hardly fits into this category. Gal. 2:11-14 is the applicable Scriptural model here.

Second, Jeff was appropriately restrained in his charge. He said Kyle's comments were "highly suggestive" of "mental divorce." This left room for Kyle to deny this intention by explaining that he had either "misspoken" or to give an interpretation of his comments which would have shown them to be reconcilable with his supposed opposition to "mental divorce." In my opinion, Kyle failed to do either. Tying this into my first point, had Jeff first approached Kyle privately, it would not have been helpful in resolving this matter, judging from Kyle's response. Even, if it had been helpful, it still would have been necessary for Kyle to go public with his explanation or correction. (Besides this, my own experiences leave me concerned that calls for private discussions over public teaching unnecessarily "bottle-neck" what must be an eventual public correction of error publicly committed and, perhaps worse, give the party in error an opportunity to do what he may be seeking to do: dissuade the righteous dissenter from his duty or, at the least, tamp down opposition by discrediting the opponent.)

Third, it seems that Kyle's denial of belief in "mental divorce" is nothing more than nominal. Allowing essentially or factually for a belief or practice while denying it by the label which is commonly put on it strikes me as either ignorant or dishonest. After reading those portions of Kyle's Matthew commentary highlighted by Jeff, it was very hard for me to see how they would not support, or allow, what is commonly called "mental divorce." If Kyle does not believe that to be the case, then he certainly had the opportunity in his response to set the record straight. The proper way for him to do that would have been to show how his Matthew commentary does not really allow "mental divorce" but is reconcilable with his stated rejection of it. Again, all he did was essentially deny a belief his commentary seems to allow and his explanation seems to leave standing.

Gary P. Eubanks

Following are just a few of the private e-mails sent to me after the materials were sent out (Names Are Removed).

Jeff:

Thanks so much for sending out this warning. The Halbrook/Willis/et. al group has obviously not given up on their determination to promote this false doctrine. How clever of them to dupe unsuspecting folks by including this pernicious error in their commentary set. I'm just thankful that they no longer have a 'captive audience' –

the Internet has seriously eroded their influence – but there are still too many who believe anything that Truth Magazine puts out.

Keep up the good work!

Well done, brother. Sad to see such poor work in the commentary.

Dear Jeff,

I have been following your exchanges with brother Pope. I truly appreciate your unwavering stand for the truth. You have really sharpened my understanding of the truth on this subject. May God richly bless you.

Jeff,

Thank you sending out this material. I also want to thank you for your website. You have done a great work in combating the various false teachings re: marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Again, Thank you.

Jeff,

Thank you for the warning and the analysis. The Scripture is straightforward on this issue (as you showed), but the error is brought in by the twists and turns of men. My experience with this is that people tend to understand the plain reading of Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:1-12 until someone confuses them with a twisted explanation such as is in this commentary. Of course, many people want to hear the twisted explanation so they can justify themselves (2Tim. 4:3-4). Thank you for standing by the truth rather than the so-called “Truth Commentary.”

Jeff,

Thanks so much for sending this warning along. You have performed a valuable service. I will pass it along to others.

Just finished reading your article. Excellent job!

Keep up the good work sounding the trumpet.