

The
Watts-Barnett
Debate

On
Divorce
& Remarriage

Watts' First Affirmative

Friends and brethren, I'm glad the providence of God permits me to take part in this important Bible discussion. I am affirming this proposition: ***The Scriptures teach that in the context of a lawful marriage there is only one lawful reason for divorce.*** I will establish this proposition by showing plainly from the Scriptures that God authorizes only one reason for divorce.

Brother Barnett denies this proposition and thus he will need to prove from Scripture that there is more than one lawful reason for divorce. The issue before us is no trivial matter. Either I teach false doctrine, or brother Barnett teaches false doctrine. Both of our positions cannot be true.

I'll establish Bible authority by means of direct commands, approved examples and necessary inferences. Emotional stories of tragic marriage circumstances will not establish Bible authority. Let us remain focused on the task before us: ***What does God say?***

Definitions

By "lawful marriage" I mean a marriage in which the parties have Bible authority to be married to each other. We are not discussing an adulterous marriage. By "only one lawful reason" I mean that there is one and only one reason authorized by God for divorce. By "divorce" I mean actions taken whereby the marriage is terminated and the parties are now Biblically described as "unmarried."

Matthew 5:32

In Matthew 5:32 Jesus said, "I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery." Jesus says that if a man divorces his wife for ***any reason except sexual immorality***, he causes her to commit adultery.

Clearly, the sin of adultery will occur when such a wife marries another. But *Jesus condemns the unlawful action* that put her into a position of vulnerability. The action that is unlawful is the action whereby one divorces his mate for "***any reason except sexual immorality.***"

The Bible is clear about the fact that if we do things that encourage or influence others to sin, we have ourselves sinned (Matthew 18:6, 1 Corinthians 8:12-13). Jesus is clear: regardless of subsequent remarriage, any divorce action that is not for the reason of sexual immorality is sin. Clearly, the man who puts away his lawful wife for any reason other than the cause of fornication is going to be held accountable by God for her future adultery.

Notice also the exclusive language of this text. **Jesus expressly rules out any other reasons for divorce.** The forcefully exclusive language of this passage is similar in nature to that of Gal. 1:6-9 where Paul forcefully excludes **any other gospel** than what has been received. Do we read Gal. 1:6-9 and need to wonder if somewhere there might be authority for another gospel tucked away somewhere in the word of God? No, because the language is forceful and excludes **any other gospel**. Likewise, the language of Mat. 5:32 is forceful and **excludes any other reason** for divorce. No other reason will be found.

Divorce for any reason other than fornication is condemned by God, even apart from subsequent adulterous remarriage. Let us do as Paul instructed in 1 Corinthians 4:6. Let us “not think beyond what is written.”

Matthew 19

In Matthew 19 Jesus is asked by the Jews, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (Mat. 19:3). Jesus’ reply in verses 4-6 is clearly “No!” It is clear the Jews understood that Jesus was answering “No” to their question, because they perceived Jesus’ answer as being contradictory to Moses’ law.

So, Jesus is asked a question about divorce for any reason and in his response, Jesus authorizes **just one reason**. He does that by showing in Mat. 19:6 that man must not separate what God has joined together. Then, He shows that fornication is the one lawful reason for divorce. There is no hint or implication on the part of Jesus that there is another authorized reason for divorce. If there were, surely this would be the place to reveal it – given the question of the Pharisees. Furthermore, His disciples got the point that divorce is lawful for **only one reason**. As a result of Jesus’ teaching, they reacted that “it is better not to marry.”

Thus far in our study we see no other lawful reason for divorce. Instead, we see Bible authority for divorce for only one reason: fornication. Let’s not “think beyond what is written.”

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

1 Corinthians 7 does nothing to modify the one lawful reason for divorce, and the prohibition on all other reasons for divorce (Mat. 5:32). In fact, 1 Corinthians 7 explicitly forbids divorce four different times (7:10, 7:11, 7:12, 7:13). Yet brother Barnett believes that in the midst of these four prohibitions, he has uncovered an additional lawful reason for divorce that is unrelated to fornication. I urge the reader to see the great irony of this.

Notice two simple truths from 7:10-11. Those truths are: (1) “Do not depart” is a command from Jesus Christ and (2) violation of this command leaves the woman “unmarried.” Obviously, the Lord is talking about divorce in this context.

When a person violates God's commands, he commits sin. And it is a Bible-wide theme that when one violates God's commands, he must repent. In 2 Cor. 7:10-11, Paul gives vivid illustrations of what repentance looks like. It begins with "godly sorrow" and continues with "diligence," "clearing of yourselves," "indignation," "fear," "vehement desire," "zeal," "vindication," and involves a proving of "yourselves to be clear in this matter."

Beyond the concept of repentance, a part of repentance is the Bible concept of restitution. If a Christian steals a car, may he repent and keep the car? Obviously he may not. A penitent Christian seeks to accomplish restitution wherever possible. Passages such as Luke 19:8 and Luke 3:8 remind us of such principles.

These Bible-wide principles of repentance and restitution force us to necessarily conclude that the woman of 1 Cor. 7:10 who divorces when Jesus says "No," **must repent and seek reconciliation.**

Besides the obvious violation of Jesus' clear command "do not depart" she sins in other ways. Her divorcing of her husband puts him in a position of spiritual danger and jeopardy (Mat. 5:32). Her divorcing her husband breaks a covenant between her and her husband that was witnessed by God (Mal. 2:14). Her action of divorcing her husband defrauds him (and her) of the proper and necessary physical relationship in marriage (1 Cor. 7:2-5). These actions are sinful and **she must repent and seek reconciliation** with her husband.

But the word "repent" isn't mentioned in 1 Cor. 7:10-11. Should we reject the idea that repentance is necessary because the word "repent" isn't found in 1 Cor. 7:10-11? No, because to do so would be to reject all that God has said about repentance being necessary for those who violate His will. Hebrews 6:1 is just one place that establishes "repentance from dead works" as a foundational matter. Additionally, to reject repentance as necessary for her because "repent" is not mentioned in this verse, would require that we do the same in passages like Mark 16:16, John 3:16 and 1 Peter 3:21 where the word "repent" is also not mentioned in the verse.

Why do we teach the necessity of repentance when we are teaching from John 3:16? Because we must teach the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Why do we teach the necessity of repentance when we are teaching from 1 Cor. 7:10-11? It is for the very same reason: we must teach the "whole counsel of God."

Moreover, I find no usage of the actual word "repent" (or its Greek equivalent) in the entirety of 1 Corinthians. Yet, it is obvious that the Corinthians put the letter from Paul into the Bible-wide context of repentance, because **that's what they did**. They repented when they received Paul's message (2 Cor. 7:8-11)

Since repentance is undeniably necessary for the woman of 1 Corinthians 7:10, someone might ask: Why does Paul say "remain unmarried or be reconciled" in verse 11? Does this "remain unmarried" suggest that she can (1) do what Jesus said not to do, (2) never feel godly sorrow over it, (3) never repent, and (4) just

“remain unmarried”? No. Repentance is essential and universal and it applies to her as surely as it applies to the men of Acts 2. Furthermore, repentance is entirely within her hands. But “be reconciled” requires that both parties agree to be reconciled. Perhaps the husband will not have her back. If so, she has done what she can and must now live with the consequences of her action: “remain unmarried.”

Is there any Bible authority in these verses for non-fornication divorce? No. On the contrary, in order for this woman to be right with God, she must repent and seek restitution and reconciliation. If reconciliation is not possible, she must remain unmarried. Let us not put a construction on 1 Corinthians 7 that is at variance with the Bible concept of repentance. To do so would be a grave mistake. Let us listen to this teaching in light of the “whole counsel of God.” And let us not “think beyond what is written.”

God authorizes only one reason for divorce. Nothing here changes that.

1 Corinthians 7:12-15

The Scriptures authorize only one reason for divorce, and prohibit all other reasons, and nothing in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 changes that. In verse 12, Paul says if a man has an unbelieving wife and she is willing to dwell with him, he should not divorce her. In verse 13 he repeats this from the opposite perspective and says, “Don’t divorce.”

Is Paul implying that if your wife is **not content** to dwell with you, you are authorized to divorce her? No. To claim this, is to claim that in the middle of two clear prohibitions on divorce, Paul is actually authorizing divorce for non-fornication reasons. To claim this also has the affect of elevating a **possible inference** over clear and direct statements of the Lord to the contrary.

Remember, we establish Bible authority by **necessary** inferences, not **possible** inferences. We must consider the “whole counsel of God,” and then reach a conclusion that is **unavoidably required** by the text. Furthermore, a necessary inference will be in harmony with all of God’s teaching on a subject. It will not create a contradiction with God’s clear commands. Likewise, the silence of the Scriptures does not create Bible authority to act in some fashion.

Let’s notice what the text clearly says about a circumstance where a mate is not content to live with their spouse. Verse 15 addresses this circumstance by means of a direct command.

In 7:15, Paul gives instruction for the scenario where an unbeliever is not content to dwell with the believer. In such a scenario **Paul does not say**, “You can lawfully divorce them for non-fornication reasons.” Nor does Paul imply it.

Rather, Paul clearly says by means of direct statement, "Let them depart." This is radically different from the theory that you can divorce your mate for some non-fornication reason if they are unwilling to live with you. On the contrary, this is authority for you not to pursue them like a slave. But this prohibition is not Bible authority for one to divorce their mate. It is authority to let them depart.

Again, God authorizes only one reason for divorce. Nothing here changes that. Let's learn to "not think beyond what is written."

No One Can Keep Us From Serving God

We see only one lawful reason for divorce in the Bible. The man-made idea of a divorce for non-fornication reasons rests upon this great fallacy: that one person can prevent another person from faithfully serving God. But the Scriptures repeatedly affirm that there is no such scenario.

Paul was imprisoned, beaten, lied about and mistreated. Did any of those efforts prevent Paul from serving God faithfully? Not in the least! Paul always faithfully served God. Certainly, when in prison, he could not assemble with the saints as he wished. But his ability and our ability to serve God is not limited to those times where we have full freedom from duress and mistreatment. Whatever circumstance or situation, each person can fully and completely faithfully serve God until death.

In fact, God commands it. Consider three women living in the first century. The first woman lives in Smyrna. The second woman is a slave who has a cruel master. The third woman is married to a cruel husband.

To the woman in Smyrna, Jesus in Revelation 2:10 says terrible persecution will come your way, but "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." It is obvious that no amount of mistreatment can prevent her from serving God faithfully. Factually, she can be "faithful until death."

To the slave woman who has a cruel master, he says in 1 Peter 2:18, "be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh." He goes on to show that she must endure beatings even when innocent. And Peter says, "this is commendable before God." And, Peter says Christ's behavior when mistreated is an example for her. Clearly, she can submit to a cruel master and continue to serve God faithfully.

To the woman with a cruel husband, what does God say? Are we to believe that to the woman at Smyrna God says, "Be faithful until death," and to the slave woman God says, "Submit even to the harsh," but to the wife with a cruel husband God says, "You can't serve faithfully. Divorce him"?

No. God likewise instructs wives (and husbands too) to be faithful even in difficult circumstances. After God tells servants to submit even to the harsh, God says in 1 Peter 3:1, “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands.” The “likewise” draws our attention back to the behavior of the faithful slave and to the behavior of the Son of God. And Peter goes further and shows women they must submit even to non-Christian husbands.

The Bible affirms that no one can ever stop another from serving God faithfully. One may be imprisoned or mistreated, but to the slave, citizen and wife God says, “Be faithful.”

Endure For the Kingdom’s Sake

Friends, the Bible reveals only one authorized reason for divorce. There is no other authorized reason. He does not authorize a man to divorce his wife because of mistreatment or harshness, or a wife her husband. On the contrary, God calls upon people to “endure for the kingdom’s sake.”

There are many sad and tragic marriage circumstances. But these sad and emotional stories do not establish Bible authority. ***We’re interested in what God actually said***, and God is clear. There is only one authorized reason for divorce.

Let us learn to “not think beyond what is written.” Let us endure all things for the kingdom’s sake.

First Negative

Maurice Barnett

Brother Watts is in the affirmative with a proposition to prove. That is his responsibility. However, merely asserting a proposition to be true does not make it true. To merely assert is only to *claim* a thing to be true, but with no evidence. At the same time, much of what he says has nothing to do with the issue.

“*Divorce*” is the focus of his proposition. Understanding its proper Biblical usage is necessary as a foundation for our discussion. One of the problems is the English word, “divorce.” It is loaded with implied meanings that get in our way of understanding key verses of Scripture. From the original text of the New Testament, there are three Greek words that apply to our subject—*choridzo*, *apoluo* and *aphiemi*. In the passages we will examine, they are *synonyms*. They mean to separate, to divide, to leave, depart, loose from, put away, etc. Especially,

when referring to physical relationships, they identify putting space between two persons, a spatial separation.

In Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus repeats the basic, general, law of God stated at creation. It is the ideal. Man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife and the two become one flesh. What God has joined together, let not man *separate*. The word “separate” is from the Greek, *choridzo*. The physical nature of this union is seen in the action of a man *leaving* parents and *joining* with the woman. I Corinthians 6:16 says—

“Or know ye not that he that is joined to a harlot is one body? for, The twain, saith he, shall become one flesh.”

The word “joined” is from *kollao*, the same word translated “cleave” in Matthew 19:5. Paul says that this cleaving made them “one body” because God said they would become “one flesh.” Again, this is exactly what Matthew 19:5 says. At some previous point, this man had married the woman and it was a lawful marriage when consummated but she had become a practicing harlot. She was continuing in fornication and would not change. In the phrase, “is one body,” the verb is *present, active, indicative*. It means his relationship with her was ongoing just as being *joined* to the Lord in the same context is ongoing. Paul then says, “flee fornication.” His continued relationship with her, that he accepted, made him guilty by association and had to end. While Matthew 19:9 *allows* one to put away a spouse who has committed fornication, I Corinthians 6 *demands* it if the spouse continues in fornication. “Marriage” is a physical relationship that is under man’s decision and control but is still regulated by the law of God. The “bond” is another matter that we will not discuss at the moment.

After Jesus said, “what God has joined together, let not man put asunder,” the Jews objected, “Why then did Moses command to give her a writing of divorcement and send her away?” “Send her away” is from the Greek word, *apoluo*. By their statement, the Jews referred to Deuteronomy 24:1. There it specifies, “send her out of his house,” spatial separation. Thus, *apoluo* means, as translated, “send (her) away.” So, the Jews well understood what Jesus was saying when He used “*choridzo*,” Matthew 19:6. They understood that it meant the same as “*apoluo*.” Then, Jesus uses *apoluo* just as the Jews did. “Whoever *puts away* his wife...,” Matthew 19:9. It refers to a separation, *choridzo*, that places a person in a position so that he *might* marry someone else, right or wrong. By *apoluo*, a person becomes unmarried and by *choridzo* one becomes unmarried.

Choridzo appears again in I Corinthians 7:10-11 and is there used in the same sense as Matthew 19:6. By “departing” the woman is *unmarried*. The statement, “but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” is a parenthesis, and is so noted in our translations. Set it aside for the moment and connect the flow of statements — “That the wife depart (*choridzo*) not from her husband and that the husband leave (*aphiemi*) not his wife.” She is not to depart and he is not to leave; they mean the same thing. Thus, *choridzo* and

aphiemi are synonyms here. Whatever *depart* means, *leave* means. Since *depart* refers to *becoming unmarried*, then so does *leave*.

Verses 12-13 tell us this—if the unbeliever is content to dwell with the believer, then the believer is not to leave, *aphiemi*. We know from verse 11, *aphiemi* is a synonym for *depart*, in this context. But, there is more. Verse 14 is another parenthesis. In verses 12-13,15, the flow of argument is, if the unbeliever is content to dwell, the believer is not to leave, *aphiemi*, but if the unbeliever departs, *choridzo*, the believer is to let them depart, *choridzo*. Again, this shows that *choridzo* and *aphiemi* are synonyms just as we have seen that *choridzo* and *apoluo* are synonyms on this subject. Thus, all three words refer to the same action: *choridzo*, *apoluo*, *aphiemi*—a spatial separation which renders the parties *unmarried*. Here are some comments from the Luow and Nida Lexicon on this—

“34.78: aphiemi {e} ; choridzo {b} ; apoluo {d} ; lusiis ”, eo ” f: to dissolve the marriage bond - ‘to divorce, to separate.’ ... Expressions for divorce are often based on terms meaning literally ‘to send away,’ ‘to separate from,’ or ‘to leave one another.’ However, in a number of languages idiomatic expressions are employed, for example ‘to send him off with his clothes,’ ‘to untie the knot between them,’ or ‘to throw away her hearthstones.’ Some persons have attempted to make an important distinction between *aphiemi* in #1Cor 7:11 , 13 and *choridzo* in #1Cor 7:15 on the assumption that *aphemi* implies legal divorce, while *choridzo* only relates to separation. Such a distinction, however, seems to be quite artificial.”

The *general* law is “what God has joined, let not man separate,” Matthew 19:6. However, Matthew 19:9 states an *exception* to that rule. One can spatially separate from, end the marital relationship, send away a spouse who is guilty of fornication and then marry someone else. If they end the marriage for any other cause, they cannot marry someone else. *Apoluo* means exactly the same, whether the putting away is for fornication or not. I agree with brother Watts that there is no other exception given that will allow *remarriage* for at least one of the parties after a putting away takes place.

However, keep in mind that Matthew 19:9 is talking about putting away AND remarriage, not just putting away. Brother Watts wants us to think Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 are talking about *just* putting away. That is not what Jesus said. It’s like Mark 16, “he that believeth *and* is baptized.” A Baptist focuses on “believe” as the only requirement for being saved. But, believe and be baptized are connected with the conjunction, *kai*, just as is Matthew 19:9, “put away *and* marry another.” Jesus knew the heart of the Jews and what they intended by their question, “Can a man put away his wife for every cause?” They were not asking just about “putting away.” They were interested in putting away so they could marry someone else. This is why Jesus said what He did in verse 9. *He was instructing on the right or non-right to remarry.*

Another fact to keep in mind is, these rules are applicable to all cultures, of all nations, of all systems of social practice and/or law. It is applicable to twenty-first

century America but Jesus did not have our legal system *specifically* in mind when he stated the rules. In some cultures, there are no legal requirements as we have in this country. Where such legalities exist, they may be far different from our own.

Need for clarification

There are some things brother Watts needs to clarify. He *argues* on the basis that a woman must stay with a husband regardless of what the husband does to her. If this is so, it can only mean that a husband can beat his wife regularly and even torture and kill her (and the children), but she can't leave the man in order to escape! She must stay there and take it or she sins and will go to hell for it. But, if brother Watts *doesn't* believe that and he thinks a woman can do whatever is necessary to escape the danger for herself and her children, *what passage will he refer to where God authorizes her doing so?* Tell us, brother Watts. Either she can or she can't.

If brother Watts thinks a wife can leave the husband under extreme physical danger, but can't "divorce," then we are looking at a new definition of "divorce." It means she can stop all marital relationships, withdraw all contact, maintain spatial separation, but she just can't dissolve the legal contract in twenty-first century America. In that case, there is hardly a penny's difference between what I believe and what he practices. Brother Watts must give us a more precise view of his concept.

Misused Passages

Brother Watts refers to Revelation 2:10—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." He uses this statement to insist that one can still "serve" God under conditions as severe as being put to death. By "serve," he means one can still just pray, though nothing more than that. However, by extension, he implies that a woman is to stay with a husband even if he kills her. If he doesn't mean that, then his argument on this passage has no application to our discussion and means nothing. Let's look at the context of Revelation 2:10—

"Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."

Jesus is talking about a persecution where the disciples would be thrown into prison, be tortured and even killed. There would be nothing they could do about it. I agree that this is so. As applied to our discussion, if a woman finds herself facing death, a prisoner of marriage, brother Watts' argument is, to be faithful, she cannot escape. Tell us, brother Watts, where and when did God give a man the power of life and death over his wife?

Or, what shall we say about Paul and Silas in prison? They were made fast in stocks in the inner security section of the prison. They had no way to escape.

There was no choice. But, when the bonds were loosened and the doors opened, a way out opened for them. Should they not have taken it? Paul escaped from assassins in Damascus, Acts 9:23-25, by going over the wall at night. He used civil authority in Jerusalem, Acts 21-22, which saved his life when the Jews were about to kill him. He later said from his Roman prison, he would rather die and be with Christ, but to remain for the brethren's sake was more needful, Philippians 1:23-25. He still had to do work for the Lord. However, the time finally came, II Timothy 4:6, and he had no choice left. The word, "offered," in this verse is *passive voice*. He was the recipient of the action, under their complete control; they killed him and he had no way to stop it.

Peter was thrown into prison, Acts 12:1ff, chained with two chains, between two guards. There was nothing he could do about that until an angel came and brought him out from prison, safely. But, Jesus said, John 21:18-19, the time would come when Peter would be bound, *taken where he did not want to go* and would be put to death. There would be no choices left for Peter then.

Jesus warned the disciples about the Roman invasion at the destruction of Jerusalem, Matthew 24:15ff. The disciples were to flee from the city. It is an echo of the prophecy of Zechariah 14:4-5: they were to flee into the valley of the mountains. When disciples had a choice like this to save life and limb, they took it, and rightly so. Jesus told them to do so.

Brother Watts also uses I Peter 2:18—"Servants, *be* in subjection to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward," and I Peter 3:1—"wives be in subjection to your own husbands." He ties those two passages together. What conclusion can we reach from his doing that except brother Watts thinks a wife is in subjection to her husband just like a slave to a master? Brother Watts, is that really your view of a wife's role in marriage?

In the first place, even slaves were to be subject to a master *only* in things that were honorable. Could a master in the first century demand that a slave have perverted sexual conduct for the entertainment of dinner guests? Some of them did. A master could demand lying, murder or any other vile and ungodly thing and expect a slave to obey him. Is God requiring that the slave who was a Christian do all of those things because the master demanded it? No way! It might cost the slave his life by refusing because there might not be any other choice. But, if there was a way of escape from the master to save life and limb, could the slave have taken it? Tell us, brother Watts.

The only conclusion I can reach from his line up of passages and arguments is that a woman is obligated by the Lord to stay with a sadistic husband who dishes out torture followed by killing her and the children. Does she really have to stay in a situation of such extreme abuse? Such abuses are real life situations we have to deal with. I am not referring to such conditions just for emotional impact. Brother Watts has already introduced emotional images by implying a woman cannot leave a husband under any circumstance other than his fornication; she must stay with him and be beaten to death if that is what he wants to do to her and

his children. That sounds pretty emotional to me. Just how are we to apply scripture to these predicaments?

As for I Corinthians 7:10-11, we have only another assertion from brother Watts. He needs to give us the evidence that what he claims is what this passage says. Brother Watts, you are in the affirmative in this discussion. That means you are to present *evidence* for your position. I will deal with I Corinthians 7:10-11 and other items in the course of this discussion but I first want to see more from you than just assertions.

Watts' Second Affirmative

I'm pleased that God's providence permits me to continue in this important Bible discussion with brother Barnett. I continue to affirm this proposition: ***In the context of a lawful marriage, there is only one lawful reason for divorce.*** Unfortunately, brother Barnett continues to believe and teach that there is more than one lawful reason for divorce.

Spatial Separation Accomplishes Divorce?

Brother Barnett spent considerable space seeking to convince us that the Bible concept of divorce is essentially just the act of "spatial separation." But he needs to tell us ***when*** "spatial separation" accomplishes divorce. Is divorce accomplished ***anytime*** there is spatial separation? If a man serves overseas in war, does the spatial separation between he and his wife mean they are divorced? If Suzie's husband gets drunk and hits her, and she spends a night or two at her mother's house – is that a divorce? Please tell us clearly.

Or, does "spatial separation" accomplish divorce only when accompanied by ***intent*** to end the marriage? If so, please tell us brother Barnett how we know of this intent?

In truth, Biblical divorce is spatial separation ***together*** with legal and societal recognition of the intention to end the marriage. That is, Biblical divorce occurs not with mere spatial separation, but when a marriage is terminated in accord with legal and societal standards for how marriages are to be terminated.

We will await further clarification from brother Barnett, but ultimately this debate centers not on ***how*** one accomplishes a divorce, but for ***what reason*** one may divorce their mate.

God's word is clear: divorce is authorized only for the cause of fornication.

Matthew 5:32

In his very limited effort to address my affirmative arguments, brother Barnett says, "Brother Watts wants us to think Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 are talking about *just* putting away. That is not what Jesus said."

To the contrary, brother Barnett has ignored the facts of what Jesus actually said in Matthew 5:32. I demonstrated in my first affirmative that in Matthew 5:32 Jesus condemns ***the unlawful action of divorce*** that puts this woman into a position of vulnerability. Jesus does not say, "Whoever ***divorces and marries another*** causes his wife to commit adultery." Instead, Jesus says, "...whoever ***divorces*** his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery."

I teach ***exactly*** what Jesus says in this place. Brother Barnett ***does not teach exactly*** what Jesus says in this place. Jesus says any divorce not for fornication is unlawful. Brother Barnett disagrees with Jesus. He believes and teaches something altogether different.

The simple fact of the matter is that Matthew 5:32 resolves this debate. Jesus condemns divorce for any reason other than fornication. Sadly, what Jesus condemns, brother Barnett condones.

Barnett vs. Barnett on Matthew 5:32

In 1983 brother Barnett said this about Matthew 5:32,

"The reply of Jesus sets things straight. ***The man who puts away his wife, without the cause of fornication, must also be held accountable for her adultery***, and the one who marries her when she is put away also commits adultery." – Maurice Barnett, *Gospel Anchor*, October 1983, page 19. {Emphasis mine – dwjr}

There was a time when brother Barnett understood and defended this plain teaching from Jesus. He understood that "The man who puts away his wife, ***without the cause of fornication***, must also be held accountable for her adultery..." Now, tragically, he no longer teaches what Jesus ***says***.

Friends, there is only one authorized reason for divorce. Matthew 5:32 forbids all other reasons for divorce. We must teach this truth and reject all who teach otherwise.

Matthew 19

In Matthew 19:3, Jesus is asked this question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” Notice their exact question. There’s no need for us to read their minds. Brother Barnett goes beyond what is revealed in the text. He said of the Pharisees:

“They were not asking just about ‘putting away.’ They were interested in putting away so they could marry someone else. “

But this is not revealed by Scripture. The Jews asked about divorce. They ask nothing of remarriage. And Jesus shows definitively that divorce is not to take place (Mat. 19:6).

They knew that Jesus was speaking against divorce (regardless of future remarriage) because they saw his answer as a contradiction of what Moses permitted. Then, after their second question regarding divorce (v. 7), Jesus goes on and shows the consequences of unlawful divorce. Matthew 19:9 reminds us that in cases of unlawful divorce, subsequent remarriage is unlawful.

Brother Barnett’s belief that there is more than one lawful reason for divorce puts him at odds with Jesus’ simple statement, “Whoever divorces his wife **for any reason other than fornication** causes her to commit adultery.”

Barnett vs. Barnett on Matthew 19:9

Again, brother Barnett once taught the truth on Matthew 19:3-9 – that divorce is unlawful except for one reason. Again, from 1983:

“Only a sexual violation would affect this union established on the basis of sexuality. So, **fornication of all kinds would violate God’s order from the beginning and would be the only natural exception allowing a putting away. No other reason would be acceptable**, but that one would be.” – Maurice Barnett, *Gospel Anchor*, October 1983, page 16. {*Emphasis mine – dwjr*}

Friends, there is only one authorized reason for divorce. Matthew 5:32 forbids all other reasons for divorce. We must teach this truth and reject all who teach otherwise.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

I dealt extensively with 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 in my first affirmative. Unfortunately, brother Barnett chose not to respond. He simply claimed that I

had only made “assertions” and that he would deal with these things “later.” I hope “later” is sometime before his third negative.

In the mean time, let me reiterate how damaging 1 Corinthians 7 is to brother Barnett’s doctrine.

Paul says that Jesus’ command “not to depart” is in fact a command from the Lord (cf. Matthew 19:6, Mark 10:9). Scripture reveals that to violate God’s commands is sin and that if a person wants to be right with God, they must repent. Scripture also reveals that restitution and reconciliation are a natural and necessary part of repentance. (Please refer back to my first affirmative.)

The consequences of brother Barnett’s position are that the woman of 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 may (1) do what Paul said not to do, (2) violate God’s command, (3) refuse to sorrow over this sin, (4) refuse to repent, and (5) just remain “unmarried.”

But God’s revelation shows that the woman of 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (1) sins when she violates God’s law, (2) must feel sorrow and regret over this sin, (3) repent and seek restitution and reconciliation with her husband if possible, and (4) if reconciliation is not possible, remain unmarried.

As I detailed in my first affirmative, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 gives no authority for divorce for non-fornication reasons. This is Bible truth. God authorizes one and only one reason for divorce.

Friends, there is only one authorized reason for divorce. Matthew 5:32 forbids all other reasons. We must teach this truth and reject all who teach otherwise.

1 Corinthians 7:12-15

Nor did brother Barnett respond to the scriptural proof I demonstrated from these passages which show there is only one lawful reason for divorce. I showed Bible proof. Brother Barnett remained silent.

Let’s reiterate this simple truth. 1 Corinthians 7:10 forbids divorce. So do verses 11, 12 and 13. Yet, brother Barnett imagines that in the midst of these four prohibitions on divorce, Paul actually authorizes divorce! Amazing!

Furthermore, verse 15 addresses the point in question for brother Barnett. What if the unbeliever is not willing to live with you? God’s inspired apostle says, “let them depart.” He does not say, “Divorce them!” If verse 15 had directly authorized divorce, then brother Barnett’s position would be upheld. But instead,

verse 15 clearly (by means of a direct statement) destroys brother Barnett's claim of a new right to divorce.

Friends, there is only one authorized reason for divorce. Matthew 5:32 forbids all other reasons. We must teach this truth and reject all who teach otherwise.

1 Peter 2:18-3:1

As I showed in my first affirmative, brother Barnett's claim that there is more than one lawful reason for divorce is based upon a great fallacy. That great fallacy is that one person can stop another person from faithfully serving God. In truth, the Scriptures reveal that our ability to faithfully serve God is **not** contingent upon complete freedom from mistreatment or duress. This Bible truth is absolutely devastating to the false doctrine brother Barnett teaches.

1 Peter 2:18-25 proves that a servant can faithfully serve God even when mistreated. God shows that they may even endure beatings and yet they can be faithful to God. To help us understand, God even gives the servant the picture of Jesus as an example (1 Peter 2:21-25). 1 Peter 3:1 then makes application to wives.

Yet brother Barnett says of the connection between 1 Peter 2:18-25 and 1 Peter 3:1,

“He [brother Watts] ties those two passages together. What conclusion can we reach from his doing that except that brother Watts thinks a wife is in subjection to her husband just like a slave to a master?”

There's just one problem with brother Barnett's claim. The problem is that it was not “brother Watts” that tied those passages together.

God, not “brother Watts,” **but God says** in 1 Peter 3:1, “Wives, **likewise**, be submissive to your own husbands...” The ASV says, “In like manner.” Thayer says this word *homoiōs* means, “likewise, equally, in the same way.” It is obvious to a fair-minded reader that God is showing wives (and for that matter husbands) that they can be faithful to God in difficult circumstances in the same manner that servants can be faithful to God in difficult circumstances.

As I detailed in my first affirmative, it is clear that whether the woman is a Christian in Smyrna, or a servant, or a wife, nobody can force her to quit faithfully serving God. Brother Barnett failed to adequately respond to this clear comparison. I know he believes the servant can remain faithful despite great trouble. I know he believes the Christian in Smyrna can remain faithful despite even the actual threat of death. Yet, he falsely believes the wife (or husband) cannot remain faithful in difficult circumstances. This gross inconsistency in his doctrine reveals that this doctrine comes from men, not God.

Friends, there is only one authorized reason for divorce. Matthew 5:32 forbids all other reasons. We must teach this truth and reject all who teach otherwise.

Emotional Appeals Do Not Establish Authority

We must also remember the real issue before us. We decide matters of Bible truth by determining what God has **said**. We don't determine Bible truth by conjuring up twisted hypothetical situations, twisting those situations into a Gordian knot, and then claiming that such twisted contrivances constitute authority.

Brother Barnett sadly has chosen to abandon established methods of determining Bible authority and has mostly relied on emotional appeals. He has not provided one shred of Biblical evidence that proves his denial of our proposition. Instead, he conjured up a husband who is regularly beating, torturing and even killing his wife and children.

Above the noise of the torture and torment we hear brother Barnett's question: What can she do? He wonders if "brother Watts" is so cruel as to prohibit such a woman from a "life-saving" divorce.

Does brother Barnett actually believe that such a woman has only two choices? He seems to think that her only options are "die" or "divorce." Fair-minded brethren realize that such a woman has authorized options besides "die" or "divorce." But fair-minded brethren also understand that **there is one option that God does not authorize for her**. God does not authorize her to divorce her husband.

But in truth, this is not even germane to the proposition we agreed to discuss. My job is to appeal to Scripture, not emotionalism. That's brother Barnett's job as well. So far, brother Barnett has leaned on emotionalism, not Scripture.

Our job is to abide in Scripture, submit to Scripture and not think beyond what Scripture reveals (John 8:31-32, 1 Cor. 4:6). And Scripture reveals only one authorized reason for divorce.

Emotional Appeals Do Not Modify God's Revelation

These emotional arguments from brother Barnett remind me of our Baptist friends who bewail the man who is run over by a freight train on his way to be baptized. What happens to him? Will he go to heaven? Will he be saved? In so doing, they set aside what God has **said** and replace it with human judgment of what is "fair."

Sadly, brother Barnett makes lofty emotional arguments. Likewise, his is an appeal to *human* judgment of right and wrong instead of *Divine* revelation of right and wrong. Not all the world's emotional stories constitute one drop of Bible authority. When we're done with all the hypothetical situations, the Scriptures still teach: ***that in the context of a lawful marriage, there is only one lawful reason for divorce.***

Let's Watch Closely

I look forward to brother Barnett's second negative. I hope he will make a real effort to address the Scriptural proof I have put forward. Let us hear from him book, chapter and verse – not contrived hypothetical stories.

I have shown repeatedly that Matthew 5:32 forbids divorce that is not for the cause of fornication. Let us hear from brother Barnett on this.

I have shown repeatedly that Matthew 19:3, 6 and 9 deals directly with a question of divorce, not a question of divorce and remarriage. I have shown that Jesus forbids divorce except for fornication. Let us hear from brother Barnett on this.

I have shown repeatedly that 1 Corinthians 7:10 forbids divorce. I have shown that violation of this command is sin. I have shown that the Bible teaches repentance as necessary when we violate God's commands. I have shown that 1 Corinthians 7:11 also forbids divorce. I have shown that verses 12 and 13 likewise forbid divorce. Let us hear from brother Barnett on this.

I have shown repeatedly that 1 Corinthians 7:15 expressly deals with the circumstance brother Barnett contemplates. It shows that in circumstances where an unbeliever is not willing to live with the believer, the believer is authorized to let the unbeliever depart. They are not authorized to divorce the unbeliever. Let us hear from brother Barnett on this.

I have shown repeatedly that God reveals that no one can stop us from being faithful to God. No one can stop the servant. No one can stop the Christian in Smyrna. And no one can stop a husband or wife from faithfully serving God. Let us hear from brother Barnett on this.

I have shown repeatedly that God authorizes only one reason for divorce. Let us hear from brother Barnett on this.

Second Negative

Maurice Barnett

In my last article, I defined “divorce” from lexical definitions and scripture usage. The result of “divorce” is that one becomes unmarried. It is not temporarily being apart for some reason. It is an intentional act for the purpose of putting physical space between the two. No one can “divorce” for just *any* reason whether or not they remain unmarried. Brother Watts implies I believe otherwise. I suggest the reader review what I said.

Brother Watts agrees that “depart” and “leave” in I Corinthians 7:10-15 refer to “divorce.” But, he changes the nature of conditional sentences and makes absolutes out of them. I will discuss verse 11 shortly. Are we to understand verses 12-13 to say “a wife or husband, with an unbelieving spouse, is commanded never to leave under *any* circumstance?” However, the verses actually say, “*If* the unbeliever is content to dwell, don’t leave.” What if the unbeliever is *not* content to dwell but isn’t going to depart, either?

Brother Watts thinks he has me in a contradiction because of what I said in the 1983 Gospel Anchor. There is no contradiction. Consider: In Matthew 5:32, the put away woman remarries and thus commits adultery, as does the man who marries her. The husband must share the guilt for putting her in that position, *provided she does marry another*. However, what if she does not remarry? I know of such cases. She remains celibate; she has not committed adultery. He has *not* made her an adulteress because no adultery has been committed. What if a man puts away his wife without fornication but does not remarry, nor does the put-away woman? Neither one has committed adultery. Where, then, is the specified sin, *in these verses*? Everything in Matthew 5:32, 19:9 is conditioned on putting away AND remarriage, not just putting away. Our differences are not about a man who puts away his wife for just any reason. Our differences are about the woman who leaves a husband because of the danger to life and limb.

Further, I don’t have to read the minds of the Pharisees in verse 3. Jesus did that for us, which is seen by his response in verse 9. He knew what they were asking.

Brother Watts complains that I am relying on, “twisted, hypothetical situations,” instead of scripture. But, the differences between us involve whether or not a woman has the right to escape, *in whatever way necessary*, to save life and limb of herself and her children. Any mention of that is going to be emotional. But, it is *inherent* in our differences. I presented a number of scriptures where disciples were told to escape physical danger and examples of their doing so.

On I Peter 2:18ff, he completely *ignores* the arguments I made and continues with nothing but assertions. I suggest the reader go back to my last response and compare it with what brother Watts continues to claim.

He further says that there are “other options” than die or leave that a wife has, but *he doesn't tell us what those options are*. If he had not been so repetitious in his article, he would have had room to tell us this important point. If die or leave are the *only* options left to her, what else is there? Pay close attention to just what I asked for in that question, brother Watts, and give us an answer. Now, to a pivotal verse.

“But unto the married I give charge, *yea* not I, but the Lord, That the wife depart not from her husband 11 (but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband); and that the husband leave not his wife.” I Corinthians 7:10-11.

Brother Watts says he dealt “extensively” with I Corinthians 7 in his first article, which should surprise the readers. The fact is he only made some assertions. He continues to do so. He has to *reconstruct* I Corinthians 7:10-11 so it will fit his theory. He changes the grammar of God's word, adds conditions that are not there and winds up with finally admitting that “remain unmarried” in the verse *is* acceptable to God, as long as his preconditions are met. Does God allow her to flee a life threatening situation, but she sins if she does? It can't be both ways. Tell us, brother Watts, what are those options you mentioned? Let's now see if we can *extensively* deal with I Corinthians 7:10-11.

Paul says, in I Corinthians 7:10, that the Lord, Himself, taught something relating to these verses, *including what is said in the parenthesis*. “Depart (*choridzo*) not from her husband” takes us directly back to Matthew 19:6—What God has joined, let not man separate (*choridzo*). Brother Watts agrees to that. Since God makes the rules, He can also grant exceptions to the rules; man cannot do that. Matthew 19:9, itself, is an exception to that rule, as we have amply seen. There are many instances in Scripture where God makes a general rule but in other contexts reveals exceptions; the Sabbath law is an example.

Our quest begins with analyzing the parenthesis of verse 11—“*but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband.*”

“*Should she depart*”—The word, “depart,” is the same word, *choridzo*, we have seen before. Here it is passive in *form* but actually is *middle voice* in understanding, which is typical of the form of middle voice Greek verbs. It is middle voice in both verses 10-11 and in verse 15. What that means is, the woman *initiates the departing* while the unbelieving husband in verse 15 *initiates the departing*. It is not that she has been put away by the husband any more than the woman of verse 15 is putting away the unbelieving husband. The following authorities list it as middle voice: Wigram's *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, page 441. *Analytical Greek Lexicon, Revised* by Harold Moulton, 1978, page 441, with following comment: “mid. Aor. 1, (pass.form)...*to dissociate one's self, to part*, I Co. 7:10,11,15...” The most recent volume, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* by Perschbacher, page 442 says the same as Moulton. The Louw and Nida

Lexicon, 34.76, translates it thusly—“if she separates from her husband, let her remain unmarried’ #1Cor 7:11.”

Further, in verse 11, the husband is not to “leave,” *aphiemi*, his wife. It is *present, active* in form. He initiates any leaving from his wife, not that he “puts away” the wife, as the KJV reads. She is not to depart, he is not to leave. They mean the same thing.

“*Remain unmarried*”— “Unmarried,” *agamos*, is the opposite of being “married.” The word, “remain” means “to remain in the same place over a period of time - `to remain, to stay,” Louw and Nida *Lexicon*, 85.55. The grammatical form of this word, in this passage, is found only here and in I Corinthians 7:20, 24, Hebrews 13:1 and I John 2:24. Notice that in each of these verses, the translation includes the word, “let.” It indicates permission to do something. Its present, active form emphasizes *continuing in* the condition of being unmarried. Remember: we have an “if – then” construction. *If* she departs, *then* she is to remain unmarried or be reconciled.

“Or” — “a marker of an alternative,” Louw and Nida *Lexicon*, 89.139. See Matthew 5:36, “white or black.”

“Be reconciled”— The word, “reconcile,” in contexts such as this, refers to a restoration of friendly interpersonal relations that were broken by hostility. Brother Watts insists that the initiative to reconcile rests with the woman who has departed. She must try to reconcile with the husband. However, that is the *opposite* of what “be reconciled” means here. The Greek verb form is *aorist, passive, imperative*. The *Anaytical Lexicons* mentioned above, all list it as simply *aorist, passive*—Wigram, page 217, Moulton, page 217. Perschbacher, page 224, says, “pass. to be reconciled, Rom. 5:10; I Cor. 7:11, 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, 20.” Note the verses cited by Perschbacher; they are the *only places* where the *aorist, passive* form of *reconcile* is found. Romans 5:10 speaks of our being reconciled to God through Christ. In Romans 5:11, it is a noun in the phrase, “through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” The word “received” means, “to receive or accept an object or benefit for which the initiative rests with the giver, but the focus of attention in the transfer is upon the receiver - `to receive, receiving, to accept,” Louw and Nida *Lexicon*, 57.125. This fact can be seen in II Corinthians 5:18-19 that “God reconciled us to Himself through Christ,” that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself...having committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” Then, verse 20 says—

“We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.”

God, in His mercy, initiates the action to get us to reconcile. “Reconciled” is not active voice, which would mean we have to convince God to save us; we don’t have a “mourner’s bench” religion. “Reconciled” in verse 20 is *aorist, passive, imperative*, the *same form* as in I Corinthians 7:11. In that verse, *the husband must initiate the action to get her to reconcile*. It is not the woman who departs

who is to initiate anything. Obviously, the husband has caused the problem that prompted the woman to depart. He is the one who must now repent of his misconduct and seek reconciliation. Brother Watts must reconstruct the verse so it will support his theory.

The Lord Said

We know what Jesus said about “don’t depart” because of Matthew 19:6. But, *where did Jesus say anything at all that would relate to, “but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband?”* He had to say something about this *because Paul said He did*. Following are the only scriptures, in what Jesus taught, that can apply—

“And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child: and children shall rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death.” Matthew 10:21.

“But ye shall be delivered up even by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and *some* of you shall they cause to be put to death.” Luke 21:16.

“Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: ³⁶and a man’s foes *shall be* they of his own household. ³⁷He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10:34-38. See also, Micah 7:5-6.

“Now there went with him great multitudes: and he turned, and said unto them, ²⁶If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:25-26.

“Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. ²⁹Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel’s sake, ³⁰but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.” Mark 10:28-30.

“And Peter said, Lo, we have left our own, and followed thee. ²⁹And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, ³⁰who shall not receive manifold more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life.” Luke 18:28-30.

Jesus is talking about extreme conditions of division, hatred, opposition and even killings that come from inside one’s own family because of the Christian’s faith. Look at what Jesus says! These are emotional situations by their very

nature *and are scriptural in content*. Brother Watts, would you call these twisted and hypothetical emotional situations? Be careful you don't condemn the Lord with your criticisms. *The context of all of these passages* is one of extreme hostility involving loss of life and limb and can be applied in any age in the history of this world.

Who has caused the situation to reach this point of hatred, division, maiming and even death? Other people than the Christian. One's bitterest enemy may be a wife or husband. Recently, British Muslims announced that any Muslim who converted to "Christianity" would be killed. One's Muslim family is obligated to kill him or her. This is common in Muslim countries. This is the real world, brother Watts. We will be faced with this in trying to reach Muslims with the gospel. What do we say? – "I will baptize you into Christ this morning but your husband will behead you this afternoon. But, you can't leave him so you will have to let him do it!"

Jesus told the ruler, in Luke 18:22, to sell what he had, his personal property, give to the poor and then follow Jesus. As usual with His disciples, Peter did not fully understand the Lord's intention. Peter said, "we have left our own, and followed thee." "Our own" refers to their own personal property, what belonged to them. Peter considered that the apostles had, essentially, done what Jesus had just told the ruler to do. Jesus, as He often did, then gave the full truth of the matter. In verse 28, He goes *beyond* personal property to relationships. "Leave" is from *aphiemi*, spatial separation. It may be necessary to leave, not *just* material things but even relationships, because of extreme hostility from enemies in the household. *That includes a spouse*. By doing this one does not sin, but is blessed. Jesus said the leaving would be for the Kingdom's sake, His sake and the gospel's sake; all of those phrases mean the same thing. By leaving and living, hardships may come but one will be blessed beyond what he left.

Yes, brother Watts, there are situations that require spatial separation in order to serve God as God wants us to serve Him. One might have to permanently leave all personal relationships in order to stay alive and do that. *The Lord said it and that is what I Corinthians 7:10-11 is telling us*. However, if she does depart, *choridzo/aphiemi*, she can then only remain unmarried or be reconciled; there are no other choices.

Watts' Third Affirmative

Brethren, I am thankful God's providence permits me to continue in this important Bible discussion. I continue to affirm that in the context of a lawful

marriage, there is only one lawful reason for divorce. Brother Barnett continues to claim that there is more than one lawful reason for divorce.

A Simple Reminder

I begin with a simple reminder. Bible authority is established by what God **actually said**. We find God's revelation in the form of direct statements, approved examples and necessary conclusions. Acts 15 shows us that apostles and elders used these methods to learn God's will.

They did not concoct emotional stories in an effort to overthrow clear revelation. Nor did they appeal to their own sense of right, wrong and justice. Nor did they read into the text that which they wish the text had said.

I begin with this reminder because brother Barnett has again chosen to use concocted emotional stories of "extreme circumstances" and even the potential "beheading" of a Muslim convert. He again appeals to his own personal sense of right, wrong and justice. And in his explanation of 1 Corinthians 7 and Luke 18, he read into those passages a tremendous amount that God did not say.

When we see what God **actually said**, and reject everything else, we will see clearly that God authorizes only one reason for divorce.

What Are Her Choices?

Brother Barnett again wants me to prescribe solutions to his hypothetical situations of marriage discord. That's foolish. Our proposition is not about identifying the various options a woman **may have** in a bad marriage. Instead, I am affirming that **there is one choice she does not have**. She does not have (in the absence of his unfaithfulness) authority for divorce.

Brother Barnett, let's get back to the proposition. Our subject is what God **actually said**.

Life and Limb?

Throughout brother Barnett's second negative, he sought to characterize this discussion as a disagreement regarding a woman's choices when "life and limb" are threatened. He said:

"Our differences are about the woman who leaves a husband because of the danger to life and limb."

But notice that he has extended the "Barnett-Willis Privilege" to far greater areas. From *Gospel Anchor*, February 1993, page 20:

“There may be other ways that some spouse might act to stand in the way of the other’s serving God. It may come from *mental* or *emotional*, as well as *physical*, abuse that destroys spirituality. *Whatever the reasons* might be for either spouse’s decision to leave, it is to be decided on *their own judgment* that they cannot serve God and stay in that household any longer.” {emphasis mine – dwjr}

Friends, in this present debate, brother Barnett speaks about “life and limb” and “beheadings.” But he extends the “Barnett-Willis Privilege” to a realm that also includes emotional and mental mistreatment. In fact, he goes on to say that the decision to divorce must be decided on their “own judgment that they cannot serve God and stay in that household any longer.” This shows that the “Barnett-Willis Privilege” extends to a host of purely subjective reasons for divorce.

Again, the fundamental premise that one person can prevent another person from being faithful is false. The Lord told the Christians at Smyrna to remain “faithful until death” (Rev. 2:10). Peter told servants to be in subjection to even harsh masters (1 Peter 2:18). Peter applies the same principle to wives in 1 Peter 3:1. Christians, servants, wives and husbands can be faithful to God no matter what. There is no circumstance in which we *cannot* be faithful.

Sadly, he has applied this false premise not just to “life and limb” but also to causes of mental and emotional mistreatment. And he has claimed that such determinations are purely subjective decisions on the part of a mate.

Friends, God authorizes only one reason for divorce.

Mandatory Divorce

We have also learned that brother Barnett’s position might be more accurately summed up as the “Mandatory Divorce Position.” That’s because brother Barnett believes some lawful marriages *must* be terminated by divorce if one is to be faithful to God.

He said in his second negative,

“It may be necessary to leave, not *just* material things but even relationships, because of extreme hostility from enemies in the household. *That includes a spouse.*”

Notice that brother Barnett is teaching that sometimes a lawful marriage must be broken by divorce for non-fornication reasons. He says it is sometimes “necessary.” Remarkable indeed!

Wives, Children & Parents Too

But notice also that while he makes application to a spouse, he also extends this much further. Writing in *Gospel Anchor*, February 1993, page 18, regarding Luke 18:29,

“Jesus understood that there might be some circumstance when it would be necessary to leave even ‘children,’ or ‘parents’ for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. Did Jesus speak truth, or not? Someone may not like that, but he will have to argue with the Lord about it.”

Let’s summarize all of this. Brother Barnett speaks in his second affirmative about divorce for reasons of “life or limb.” Yet he argued in 1993 that the application of these principles is not just to “life and limb” but also to situations of emotional or mental mistreatment.

Second, he speaks to us about the **right** of divorcing your mate for some non-fornication reason if they mistreat you. But in reality, he argues that sometimes divorce of a mate for non-fornication reasons would be “**necessary**” or mandatory!

Finally, while brother Barnett wishes to speak about divorcing a mate “for the kingdom’s sake” he has argued in the past that these same principles would authorize one to leave and sever duties to one’s own children and parents in obvious violation of clear Scripture.

How much further will this foolishness go? Friends, God has authorized only one reason for divorce.

1 Corinthians 7

Brother Barnett has finally tried to show us authority for a new reason for divorce from 1 Corinthians 7. In the midst of a section of Scripture that four times forbids divorce, brother Barnett has found authority for divorce. I continue to be amazed.

Let’s briefly review what brother Barnett labels as “mere assertions” from me about 1 Corinthians 7:

- “Do not depart” is a command from God.
- Violation of God’s commands are sin.
- Sin demands repentance.
- Repentance is a fundamental teaching of God’s word and underlies **everything** God teaches.

- Application of 2 Cor. 7:10-11 shows that repentance from this sin of divorce necessitates an effort to reconcile and make restitution to one's mate.
- God deals with all the necessary scenarios. If a mate is content to dwell with you, God says, "don't divorce" (1 Cor. 7:12, 13). If a mate is not content to dwell with you, God says, "let them depart" (1 Cor. 7:15)

Baseless Claims

But since we're on the subject of baseless assertions, here are some claims from brother Barnett on 1 Corinthians 7. He claimed that in 1 Corinthians 7:10 the husband was mistreating the wife. He has not shown us where God **actually said** this, but he assures us it is the case.

He furthermore claims that the Greek verb tenses show that the wife has no requirement whatsoever to seek reconciliation with her husband. Essentially, brother Barnett claims that the husband of 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 mistreated his wife, she divorced him because she was forced into it, and she has no duty to seek reconciliation, much less to seek repentance.

But let's state the obvious. The only person who sees a violent husband mistreating a wife in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 is one who wishes to prop up this floundering doctrine. The idea is so patently absurd that it is almost comical to read these claims that 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 is all about an evil man mistreating his wife.

Second, despite the lengthy Greek grammar lesson from brother Barnett concerning the verb tenses of "be reconciled," remember that Paul is issuing the command "be reconciled" **to the woman**. He tells her to "remain unmarried" and he tells her to "be reconciled." Obviously, this reconciliation is something she is responsible for seeking – despite brother Barnett's claims to the contrary.

Third, despite brother Barnett's claims, the fact that "be reconciled" is an *aorist, passive, imperative* does not in any way prove that the burden is solely upon the husband to initiate reconciliation. Even a high school student, while not understanding the meaning of "aorist" can understand the meaning of the word "imperative." Be it passive or active, it is still a command issued to the woman. She must repent and seek reconciliation.

Brother Barnett makes a comparison with our reconciliation to God. He points out that we are reconciled by the blood of Christ. Yet, he knows we **must act!** Whether the Scripture uses passive or active verbs, it is imperative that we obey the Gospel and secure reconciliation.

Interestingly, the "be baptized" of Acts 2:38 is also *aorist, passive, imperative*. But the "repent" of Acts 2:38 is *aorist, active, imperative*. Does the passive

nature of “be baptized” mean we have nothing to do? Absolutely not! We must determine to repent and we must determine to be baptized. Yes, being baptized is somewhat passive, (another baptizes us) but ***we must determine*** to do it.

Likewise the wife of 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 is commanded to “be reconciled.” The passive nature of this verb does not mean she has no duty. She does! Paul directs the command to her. But reconciliation (as I have pointed out before) does depend upon some cooperation from her husband. But clearly, ***God commands her to pursue it.***

Muslim Beheadings

Brother Barnett has presented a Muslim woman in Britain that wishes to obey the Gospel but is fearful that her husband will behead her for becoming a Christian. What will brother Watts suggest?

Why not simply advise such a woman that baptism is ***not necessary*** for salvation? Wouldn't that solve the problem brother Barnett? She could just make mental assent to God and serve Him quietly in her heart?

But there's a problem. This is not what God ***said***. We're bound by what God ***actually said***. Baptism is necessary for salvation no matter what compelling hypothetical we can conjure up, even if it should cause our death.

Likewise, God authorized only one reason for divorce. God expects us to teach and preach exactly what He has revealed (Acts 4:20).

My responsibility (and brother Barnett's) to this fictitious Muslim woman is to teach just exactly what God ***actually said*** – on all subjects. Divorce is authorized for only one reason.

Matthew 5:32

I have shown repeatedly that Matthew 5:32 shows that Jesus forbids divorce for any reason except fornication. How has brother Barnett responded?

First of all, he tries to convince us that Matthew 5:32 is about divorce ***and*** remarriage. But Jesus doesn't speak about this man marrying another. Jesus targets the unlawful action that puts the wife into a vulnerable position: ***divorce for any reason other than fornication.***

Brother Barnett would have us believe that there is no sin in divorcing and putting your mate in a terrible position of vulnerability. Yet 1 Cor. 7:1-5 shows the spiritual danger. And the Scripture clearly indicates that we are not to put a cause to stumble in our brother's path (Rom. 14:13, 1 John 2:10, etc.) speak to this

point. His actions put his wife in spiritual danger. This is not lawful. Is it right when a woman wears a bikini and causes temptations for men? Of course not, this is sinful.

Matthew 5:32 – A Remarkable Admission

Also notice what brother Barnett stated in his second negative:

“The husband must share the guilt for putting her in that position, provided she does marry another.”

Notice carefully: brother Barnett teaches that a wife who is physically, mentally or emotionally mistreated by her husband is authorized to divorce their spouse for non-fornication reasons. In fact, he argues that this divorce is sometimes required by God.

He tells us a wife is authorized to divorce her husband for non-fornication reasons, but when she does what is supposedly lawful, any future remarriage on the part of her husband involves *her* in sin.

What a remarkable admission!

Friends, this is the consequence of bobbing and weaving on Matthew 5:32. When man starts to spin a doctrinal web of his own devising, he eventually gets caught in its own fibers.

The simple truth is this: Jesus forbids divorce for any reason except fornication.

Luke 18:28-29

Brother Barnett claims that Luke 18:29 provides authority to lawfully divorce one's wife for non-fornication reasons. He makes this claim in connection with Jesus' comment about one that has "left" father, mother, wife, children, etc.

But what does "left" mean? Is Jesus authorizing divorce for non-fornication reasons, contrary to what He said in Matthew 5:32? We face a similar question in Luke 14:26. What does "hate" mean? We could strip these passages out of their context and claim that Luke 18:29 authorizes actual divorce and Luke 14:26 commands actual hatred toward family.

Or, we could study the context carefully – without looking for that which Christ said would not exist (Mat. 5:32). In both cases, it is clear that Jesus is teaching that He must take a position of priority over everything else in our lives.

In Luke 18:29 for example, the context shows a young man that wouldn't give Christ the first position. Peter argues that they had done differently; they had "left all."

Factually, Peter and others of the disciples had "left" their nets, father, servants, boats and fishing careers (the same Greek and English words are used in Mark 1:18-20). Yet they would fish again (John 21:3). And by no means had Peter divorced his wife.

Clearly, the apostles' "leaving" was in contrast to the rich ruler's "not leaving." He would not subjugate everything to God. Peter and the others had subjugated "all things" to God.

Is this authority for divorce? No. This is clear instruction to put God first. Luke 18:29 does not authorize actual divorce anymore than Luke 14:26 authorizes actual hatred of "father, mother, wife and children." In both places, Jesus is simply showing that He comes first over everything.

We certainly cannot claim to be putting Christ first in our lives by doing that which He expressly forbids (Mat. 5:32), God hates (Mal. 2:14) and is nowhere authorized.

Final Words

Friends, I'll close my part in this discussion by reminding you that God authorizes only one reason for divorce. Matthew 5:32 forbids any other reason. Matthew 19:6-9 forbids any other reason. 1 Corinthians 7 does not provide authority for any other reason. Luke 18:29 does not provide authority.

In the context of a lawful marriage, there is one and only one reason for divorce.

Let's teach and preach this truth with courage and conviction. Sadly, the time will come when we will need to reject those who will not teach this simple truth (Titus 3:10-11).

Third Negative

Maurice Barnett

Please note the final paragraph of brother Watts' article. Rather than an appeal for calm study, he brought up the subject of dividing over this. Planting

such a thought in the readers' minds subtly attaches a "yellow tag of quarantine" to me and to anyone who disagrees with him. There can be no other reason for his inserting that subject into this discussion.

Brother Watts was supposed to be in the affirmative, but from the beginning has just *claimed* his proposition to be true. It was his task to define terms and catalog evidence to support his proposition. After a few early assertions, he shifted to the negative. He has continued that course.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* says that *Quibble* means—to *evade the truth of an issue with trivial distinctions and objections*. Brother Watts has been quibbling all the way through our discussion. I will note what I consider to be the most important to discuss because there are many more quibbles than I can respond to in the space I am allotted.

Quibble #1—Matthew 5:32. I dealt with this verse in detail in previous articles. Brother Watts just *repeats* his original *claim* that this verse is talking about only "divorce." I have always said that the man who puts away his wife without fornication shares the guilt in any later adultery. The passage says that. But, the adultery depends on her remarrying, her having sex with a man she has no right to. If she remains celibate, there is no adultery. How can the man make her an adulteress if there is no adultery? It is a simple necessary inference, brother Watts! The same is true for Matthew 19:9. The man who puts away his wife without fornication AND marries another, commits adultery. If there is no remarriage, if both remain celibate, there is no adultery by anyone. That is not to say that anyone has the right to put away a spouse just for *any* reason. But, *these passages* are talking about the *consequences* of putting away AND remarrying.

Quibble #2—I Peter 2:18. Brother Watts' position is that women are subject to their husbands *just like* a slave to his master. She owes absolute obedience to him even if he kills her *and the children*. That is what *subjection* means in his view of a wife's role in marriage.

In I Corinthians 7:15, Paul said that if an unbeliever is not content to dwell with the believer and is departing, the believer is "not under bondage" in such cases. The believer is to "let him depart." Duties toward that spouse stop. Let him go. The unbeliever is no longer "content" to live with the believer because of the believer's faith. This shows that there are circumstances where one can act in such a way that his spouse is relieved of responsibilities toward him.

Now look at verses 12-13. If the unbeliever is content to dwell with the believer, then, the believer is not to leave. Notice that this is a conditional statement, "if." What if the unbeliever is NOT content to dwell with the believer *but isn't going to depart, either*. The unbeliever is going to stay and cause *severe conflict*. But, with brother Watts' view, the Holy Spirit misstated these verses. What He should have said was, "It doesn't matter whether the unbeliever is content to dwell with the believer or not, the believer *cannot leave* the unbeliever." But, the Bible doesn't say that.

Marriage for a woman is not slavery and there are circumstances where responsibilities to a spouse end. Peter's reference to wives, who in like manner, are to be subject to their husbands, is speaking of an attitude of submission to leadership, not slavery.

Quibble #3—Revelation 2:10. I have already shown that the specific context of "be faithful unto death" refers to being *imprisoned under torture*. Read the context for yourselves. If one is in a circumstance where he cannot possibly escape, then there is no choice but to accept one's fate. But, if there is a chance to escape, the Christian can take it. Brother Watts takes the instructions of one circumstance and applies it to all circumstances. That's a quibble.

Quibble #4—He says, "The fundamental premise that one person can prevent another person from being faithful is false." Brother Watts quibbles on the word, *faithful*.

He said in his first article, "Paul always faithfully served God. Certainly, when in prison, he could not assemble with the saints as he wished. But his ability and our ability to serve God is not limited to those times where we have full freedom from duress and mistreatment. Whatever circumstances or situation, each person can fully and completely faithfully serve God until death." What brother Watts overlooks is that if a person can change his situation so he can do more for the Lord but *does not do it*, then *he is not being faithful*. At times we rebuke working brethren who could arrange to attend assemblies but do not whereas we have compassion on those who are too ill to be there. One is not being faithful in resigning himself to just praying when he could put himself in a situation where he could do more for the gospel's sake. Brother Watts argues that battered wives resign themselves to just praying, even though they could change their situation to more fully serve God. But, that's not being faithful!

The word "prevent" is a translation in scriptures from *kowluo*. It means "to cause something to happen, to prevent, forbid," *Louw & Nida Lexicon*, 13.146. Jesus uses it in Matthew 19:14 to tell disciples not to *prevent* little children to come to Him. Why would Jesus say that if it were not possible for it to happen? In Luke 11:52, Jesus rebukes the Jews for not just failure to enter the kingdom but also for preventing others from doing so. It appears to me that one person *can* prevent another from serving God.

Quibble #5—I Corinthians 7:11. Brother Watts' "translation" of verses 10-11 is the woman is the one who must try to reconcile with the husband if she departs; she initiates the action. She has sinned and must try to get back with the man. Without shame, brother Watts not only changes the structure of the sentence but also ridicules the grammatical form of "be reconciled" as irrelevant. Grammar means nothing to him. I showed evidence about the meaning of the verb, *reconciled*, both by authorities of the language and scripture usage.

The Greek verb for "be reconciled" is *passive, imperative*, in grammatical form as I have shown. Certainly, there is action called for from the woman. That is what the *imperative* part of the verb shows. But, that action is a *response to*

what is initiated by the husband. That is what the *passive voice* part of the verb tells us. What brother Watts does next clearly shows his casual manner of using God's word.

"Be baptized" in Acts 2:38 is *passive, imperative* just as I Corinthians 7:11. Again, the *imperative* marks a command to do something. But, he does admit, "Yes, being baptized is somewhat passive, (another baptizes us) but we must determine to do it." Of course, Peter did not say "repent and baptize yourselves." The *passive* form here is important in that it tells us baptism requires a second party who acts upon the person to be immersed. *It is initiated by another.* It is the *imperative* in the grammatical form that points out our *response* to the *command to be baptized.* But, we are *passive* in the act of being immersed.

In II Corinthians 5:18, *the Bible actually says*, "But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ." Look at it! *God reconciled us to Himself.* God did it! God planned it all, provided the means and methods of doing it and sent out the gospel message. That is what is meant by the *passive* in "be reconciled to God" in verse 20. Then, we must respond to that message which is what the *imperative* means in the grammatical form. But, *God is the one who has initiated the reconciliation.* Even though "save yourselves" from this crooked generation in Acts 2:40, KJV, ASV, is *passive, imperative* also, we do not actually save ourselves. Other translations correctly read "be saved from this wicked generation." God initiated all of it and is the one who saved us. God planned it and commanded what we are to do. We are to respond to His commands but that is said by the *imperative* in this verse.

Just so, in I Corinthians 7:11, if the woman departs, she is to remain unmarried OR "be reconciled" to her husband. She is to respond to his attempt but it is *the husband who initiates it*, not the woman. In his attempt to counter this fact, brother Watts destroys important Bible teaching here and in other passages.

Quibble #6—Luke 18:28 Paul said in I Corinthians 7:10-11 that he was referring there *to what Jesus had taught.* Brother Watts didn't touch that. I showed where Jesus taught something that related to those verses. Now brother Watts just quibbles on it.

Brother Watts ignores the context of Luke 18:28 and switches terms. Peter said, "we have left our own to follow thee." What does our "own" mean? *Louw & Nida Lexicon* says it means, "pertaining to being the exclusive property of someone—'one's own, one's property,'" 57.4. The context may state what this adjective modifies, but in some contexts it does not. We must decide what it applies to by the context.

In Luke 18, Jesus just told the young ruler who had asked what he must do to "sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor. . . and come, follow me." These were material things that could be sold. It is in *this* context that Peter said that they had left their own and followed Jesus. A footnote in the ASV translates it "own homes." This is like John 16:32 and 19:27. But, Jesus then went beyond material things to *relationships* when He included leaving "wife, brethren, parents

or children.” Peter’s statement reflects his misunderstanding of what the Lord really required; the Lord and the gospel come first before family.

I showed in my last article that this is in the overall context of extreme persecution because of one’s faith. Reader, take note again of Matthew 10:21, Luke 21:16, Matthew 10:34-38 and Luke 14:25-26. The statements of loving God and the Gospel more than family relationships are all in that context of conflict where one may have to choose between the two. If a person has the right to escape his enemies within his own household, that would include a spouse. If these verses tell us that one can leave because parents are out to kill him because of his faith, then he can also flee if a spouse is trying to do the same. They are all lumped together in these verses.

For anyone to imply that Barnett promotes abandoning “children,” meaning helpless infants, or aged parents who are unable to care for themselves, just to run off to preach, they are perverting scripture as well as unrighteously accusing me. The word *teknon*, translated children, means, “one’s immediate offspring, but without specific reference to sex or age - ‘child, offspring,’” *Louw & Nida Lexicon*, 10.36. In the passages listed above, the children referred to are as much enemies as the parents or brothers, sisters and wife. The “children” are old enough to oppose the Christian and able to persecute them just like “parents” or any other family member.

Quibble #7—Emotional references. Brother Watts says, “Brother Barnett again wants me to prescribe solutions to his hypothetical situations of marriage discord. That’s foolish.” However, *he is the one who said in his preceding article*, “Fair-minded brethren realize that such a woman has authorized options besides ‘die’ or ‘divorce.’” I asked him more than once to tell us what those options are and he never answered! He came back with *nothing but a quibble!* He, Watts, is the one who said there were “other” solutions and then charges me with foolishly wanting him to prescribe such solutions. That’s not just foolish, it’s pitiful.

Now, his position, from what he has written in this discussion, is that it’s a sin to divorce *so stay there and die!* But, we must also consider: Do parents have a responsibility to protect their small children from harm? Certainly! Maybe I should reword the above sentence to “it’s a sin to divorce so stay there and die along with your children.” That isn’t hypothetical, brother Watts. The murdering of spouses and children is happening all the time. In just one year in Arizona alone there were 80 domestic homicides, nine of them were under 18 years old. That is the real world, brother Watts. How do we apply scripture there?

Quibble #8—The Muslim dilemma: Muslims have said, “Become a Christian and you’ll be killed.” What do we advise a Muslim to do? Here is Brother Watts’ solution. “Baptism is necessary for salvation no matter what compelling hypothetical we can conjure up, even if it should cause our death.” His advice to the Muslim wife, *be baptized and die!* My advice: Flee to safety so you can obey and serve God. Jewish brethren faced the same dilemma in the first century.

Jesus said that one's own family would deliver him up to death. What advice did Jesus give? He can leave, Luke 21:16, 18:28!

Quibble #9—By allying me with Mike Willis, which, itself is a quibble called “guilt by association,” he charges me with proposing a long list of trivial reasons allowing divorce, which I deny. The *context* of my article of 1993, that he notes, details that fact. He lifted the quotation out of its context. Extreme mental and emotional abuses are a part of physical abuse. They increase the destructive effect on the body and certainly *can destroy spirituality*. Some people can endure more abuse than others but each decides his own limit. Brother Watts’ puts his own spin on what I wrote to make it appear to be what he would like for me to say. His attempt to accuse me of such a long list of trivial reasons for divorce is *why I called for this discussion to begin with*. His accusation is manufactured to support his position and enhance his yellow tag of quarantine. Anyone interested in my articles on the subject can contact me at mjbarnett1@cox.net and I will send him a copy.

I have contended for only three reasons for breaking up a marriage—fornication, extreme abuse and in order to fully serve God. The latter two are directly related and will not allow remarriage. Reread all of these articles prayerfully. I’m grateful to the Preceptor for publishing this exchange.