

MY RESPONSE TO JEFF BELKNAP  
Weldon Warnock

Before I begin my response to brother Jeff Belknap, I have a few words about the Carriage Drive congregation in Beckley, WV. They have become the focal point since Jeff got carried away with his so-called “mental divorce” theory. They are a wonderful group of people that unfortunately got caught up in this controversy due to Jeff’s zealous, unending pursuit on this issue. We had ten enjoyable years working peaceably with the good brethren in Beckley. The fact of the matter is that things changed shortly after brother Belknap arrived on the scene. The rest you know if you have logged on to his website called “Mental Divorce.”

Sifting Through Jeff’s Article

There is no topical sequence to Jeff’s article, so we will just have to sift through it and make our response.

**1. Jeff charges me with misrepresentation, baseless accusations and half-truths.** What about giving specifics, Jeff, instead of generalities? It was you, brother, who decided to put my short statement from *Searching the Scriptures* in 1985 on your website and present it in the context of heresy. You are the one who introduced this in Beckley and then complain because I defended myself.

**2. Charges have been answered in another venue.** This other venue is his website on which he posted: “Weldon Refuses To Debate.” That is a joke if there ever was one. We could also call it a falsehood. I had already accepted his challenge if we could have the debate in Beckley. He says he wanted the debate outside of Beckley. That would be place, not debate. Surely he knows the difference in place and a debate. I have a hard time believing that if Jeff had insisted that the debate be held at Beckley, the brethren would not have agreed. My opinion is that Jeff did not want a debate with me in Beckley so the brethren where he preached could not hear both sides.

**3. Jeff’s debate propositions.** They focus on whether an innocent spouse may put away or repudiate his/her mate in a post-divorce fornication situation. I was willing to accept these, but I intended to discuss the pre-divorce fornication as well. For some reason Jeff has been shifting the attention away from pre-divorce fornication to the post-divorce fornication. But, friends, he believes that, if an innocent, faithful spouse is divorced at the courthouse by a fornicating mate, the innocent party may not remarry because he/she has been put away. To Jeff it is the race to the courthouse. And, I might add, when the innocent party files for divorce and he/she cannot have put down fornication as the cause, Jeff says that is all right because, as he has written in the past, “God knows.” Well, well, it appears right here that a little “mental divorce” has crept into Jeff’s position.

Friends, according to Jeff’s doctrine, a devious spouse who had not yet committed fornication with his “girlfriend” could tell his innocent mate, “I have been secretly dating another and I am going to divorce you and marry this person so I can trap you into a life-time of celibacy. I’ll cook your goose for good.” Jeff has the innocent party eating “cooked goose” the rest of his/her days on earth.

**4. Jeff claims that all the brethren in Beckley were in agreement and all backed him.** The brethren, initially, did not know what Jeff was up to. Of course, they would not have disapproved his starting a website. They had no idea what was going to be involved. But after a period of time, it became more apparent when he began teaching the “race to the courthouse” material and became obsessed with MDR. Regrettably, he persuaded some to make this issue a test of fellowship. When did many of the brethren at Beckley start disagreeing with you Jeff? It was about the time they began studying more intensely the MDR issue and the fellowship question.

**5. Cancellation of gospel meeting.** Jeff led the way of having a preacher’s meeting cancelled, although the preacher had never written or publicly spoken as far as they knew on these minute details of Jeff’s position. So, Jeff sends him an e-mail, asking specifics to see if he measured up to Jeff’s litmus test. The preacher wrote back that he believed that only the innocent party may put away the guilty party and remarry. That wasn’t sufficient. Jeff wanted the details, the exact way he would unravel every situation. When the preacher would not get into the ravel, that did it. The meeting was cancelled. Subsequently, the preacher wrote all the members of the church about Jeff’s correspondence and his reply to it. This preacher called me to see whether I had a directory of the Beckley congregation. When I told him I did, he wanted to know if he could have a copy. I agreed to send him a copy and that is how that happened. I had no part in what this preacher wrote.

Jeff did not ask the preacher his position on such things as the A.D. 70 doctrine, grace-unity movement, unity-in-diversity, and a host of other things, but just divorce and remarriage. And when he answered Jeff’s questions about MDR by saying that fornication is the only cause for divorce which gives the innocent party the liberty to remarry, that was not sufficient for Jeff. He had to answer the question in such a way as to support Jeff’s race to the courthouse position. He didn’t seem to care so much about the potential of leading the members into liberalism, modernism, denominationalism, and Calvinism, but watch out for this MDR. We can handle anything else if perchance it comes up, but we don’t want to take a risk on MDR. Not too many years back, brethren didn’t “have a cow” over this specific issue. Common sense brethren do not now! Jeff, you are “barking up the wrong tree” when you depict me as a rabble-rouser. When I left Beckley the church was at peace. It was you, not me, who urged the brethren at Beckley to cancel this preacher’s meeting. Don’t try to blame me for the repercussions from cancelling this scheduled meeting. You reckon it was because Jeff had been in a “fight” with this preacher’s brother-in-law that caused such scrutiny and then cancellation?

**6. Position absurd, irrational, ludicrous, radical, and extreme.** These are some of the words I used on the radio broadcast to describe brother Belknap’s approach to MDR. I stand behind what I said. This does not picture or characterize all brethren who hold Jeff’s position as I have made clear in my writing and my practice. They realize that none of us has all the answers to every scenario in this divorce and remarriage question. But Jeff on MDR is like the rabid preachers who insist that women must wear an artificial covering in the public assembly or they will go to hell. Jeff thinks he has all the answers and those who disagree with him are heretics, false teachers and hell bound. That position, Jeff, is what is ludicrous, radical, extreme and irrational. To make this a test of fellowship for brethren who are not trouble-makers is ridiculous. We need another splinter group among us like we need another hole in the head.

**7. Accused of carnal actions and assaults.** In Jeff's mind my opposition to his position on MDR and to his making a hobby out of it was carnal and a personal assault. If you disagree with brother Belknap you are carnal, mean, and sinister. The truth of the matter is that Jeff was unhappy that the members could listen to the radio broadcast and hear an alternative to his website and oral teaching on the subject. When the light was turned on and the heat was turned up, then Jeff began using me as a scapegoat for the reason that many brethren would not ride with him on his hobby-horse.

**8. Barrage of letters.** Well, just one of them was mine and I wish you could read it. That letter was sent right after Jeff put me on his website. In the letter I wondered what Jeff's motive was and I included the entire article from which Jeff took his quote. Shame on me for writing a letter to brethren I had known for over ten years. This letter was sent to Jeff, also. As to the other letters, Jeff will have to explain them. One was from the preacher whose meeting Jeff led the way to have cancelled. Don't blame me, Jeff, for a barrage of letters.

**9. Thirty-nine baptisms and thirteen restorations.** We rejoice in this and whatever influence Jeff had in saving these precious souls. I would imagine, however, that he had a lot of help of teaching them from their parents, spouses, and other brethren. Adding up these numbers there would have been fifty-two. When I moved from Beckley, we were having about 115 to 120 on Sunday morning. It was far below that when Jeff left. Now don't try to pass the blame to the radio program and a barrage of letters for the decline in Beckley. If some outside sources contributed to the decrease, then you didn't make a very strong case on MDR and how you handled it. In all of this Jeff attempts to exonerate himself. He states that it was Weldon who ignited the flame of unrest in the congregation. Of course, brother Belknap was not inciting or igniting anything with his website going day and night, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, month after month, and year after year. I was on the radio thirty minutes a week in contrast. Wow! That must be a powerful radio broadcast! In Jeff's own mind he is so innocent, so pure, so peaceful, so sweet and, by all means, so chivalrous.

**10. Jeff states that I am afraid to debate anywhere, except in Beckley.** Yes, I have been scared stiff just thinking about the possibility of debating Jeff. My brother, it was at Beckley where you sowed the seed of discord. They had no trouble until you came to town and cranked up your computer and introduced this so-called "mental divorce" into the church. Out of the clear blue sky you just had to take off on a "witch-hunt" and run clear back to 1985 and introduce a parenthetical statement from me on your website and create an issue at Beckley where none existed. Brother Jeff, you remind me of the episode of one of the Andy Griffith shows where Barney Fife went back almost twenty years when Floyd Lawson, the barber, had punched Fred Crowley, owner of the local meat market, in the nose. There existed no problem until Barney wanted to resolve this unsettled case on file. Andy told Barney to let it alone, that it had been forgotten. But Barney would not listen. Before long Barney had everybody quarreling and fighting with one another. Folks, this is Mayberry all over again.

**11. Stealing his computer.** Jeff wants to make a big deal out of this "tongue in cheek" statement about the brotherhood being better off if someone walked in and stole his computer. Again, I wish you could hear the whole tape. To imply that I was seriously promoting stealing is an insult, Jeff. You know better than that. A drowning man will grab for anything.

**12. Emotional, fictitious scenarios.** Jeff claims I used fictitious stories on the radio broadcast to prey on the people's emotions. You are dead wrong, Jeff! The Vietnam soldier who returned home to find that his wife had divorced him and married another man is a true story. By the way, brother Gene Frost wrote in *Gospel Truths, Inc.*, August 2005, about this soldier that such cannot happen due to the revision of the law for military members. Brother Gene quoted from a revised code of 2003. I believe the Vietnam war was more than thirty years earlier. How could the Vietnam soldier violate a law that was enacted in 2003? Tell us if you don't mind. What is the answer, biblically, to the soldier's situation? Jeff would say when he remarried that he was living in adultery. Again, it is the courthouse race which the soldier could not enter. Brethren, this man had every right before God to remarry. Fornication was involved and it gave him the right to repudiate his wife and remarry as the innocent party. The put away person is not allowed to remarry (Matt. 5:32; 19: 9) when no fornication is involved. Please, please Jeff answer this true scenario. Do you consign the soldier to hell?

**13. Second putting away.** This is a lot of hocus-pocus. When an innocent, faithful spouse puts away a fornicating mate who has divorced civilly his/her spouse and marries another, there is no second scriptural putting away, That phrase is home-made and self-serving. Jesus gives the innocent party the right to put away the fornicator and marry another (Matt. 19:9). The fornicator does not have the God-given scriptural right to put away, but the innocent party has a right to put away the fornicator and marry again (Matt. 19:9). This would be the one, scriptural putting away. To call this a second putting away by the innocent spouse is absurd. He or she just put away once, not twice. The guilty party cannot nullify the innocent party's right. A good illustration is the one baptism (Eph. 4:5). The twelve disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6) were baptized in water two times, yet there was only one, scriptural baptism, the baptism of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19). Jeff cannot answer this point but he keeps holding on to the "second putting away."

**14. No put away person may remarry.** This is convoluted thinking on Jeff's part. Certainly, the put away person in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18 may not remarry when no fornication is involved. But what about the innocent person put away by the fornicator? Can this innocent spouse remarry or does he/she have to win the race to the courthouse? According to Jeff, the innocent party may not remarry unless he or she files a suit or a counter-suit at the courthouse. And, by the way, what Bible verse says she will have the right to remarriage if she countersues? Don't tell me what you believe; give me the Bible verse which justifies your belief. Jeff's position subordinates God's loosing of a marriage bond to the decisions emanating from the courthouse.

**15. Have no fellowship.** Some, including Jeff, are eager to draw lines of fellowship against those who differ with them in the present controversy over so-called "mental divorce" (nobody really believes or teaches "mental divorce"; Jesus said "put away," not "think away"). Just a few years ago it was not this way. But some avid zealots are going to see that it happens or "bust a hamstring" in trying. With some you don't have to teach it, just believe it. They will search the world over to try to find one word that they can latch on to and then declare you a false teacher. Brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. used to speak of the "lunatic fringe." There are those today who might well fit into that category. Ironically, these brethren can promote their views by way of websites, e-mails, books, tracts, preaching, and conversations, but those who say one word in

opposition or even think it (if they find it out) are marked as heretics.

These brethren are infallible (they think) on every detail and aspect of this issue on MDR. You can't reason with men like this. They know (?) everything, and when their inconsistency is pointed out, they hold on regardless, something like a bull dog with a bone. If the church splits wide-open, their attitude is: Let her split. What brethren are left are sound, they think. A few will cover land and sea to make one convert. A lot of this is nothing more than self-righteous smugness. It is a pious, holier-than-thou attitude.

These brethren who make this so-called "mental divorce" a test of fellowship are divided among themselves. To be consistent they need to disfellowship one another. Some believe that the putting away in Matthew 19:9 is at the courthouse. Others among them disagree. Some say that a spouse put away by a fornicating mate may remarry. Others among them disagree. Some say the innocent Jewish women of the first century in Palestine who were always given a bill of divorcement may not remarry, even though the husband was a fornicator, but innocent Jewish women outside of Palestine may remarry because they could initiate the divorce. Others among them disagree. Some of them believe that an innocent spouse who filed for a divorce against the fornicating mate may not remarry because the guilty party went to another state, filed for a divorce, and received it first. This meant that the innocent party became the put away party and may not remarry. Others among them disagree. Friends, all of this has the appearance of duplicity, does it not? Why don't these brethren debate one another? You suppose they would call one another "false teachers" and "heretics"? Maybe Jeff ought to take on some of these brethren, including the fellowship issue, in a public debate at a central location before he thinks about debating some of the rest of us.

In conclusion, let me say plainly that only three classes may marry: (1) Those who have not been married. (2) Those whose spouse has died. (3) The innocent, faithful spouse whose mate has committed fornication. This I have always believed and taught. I have written all I plan to write on this subject for awhile, unless compelled by unforeseen circumstance. This is time-consuming and I have some other things I need to do.

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