

A Review of Ron Halbrook's Sermon Outline on Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage

Samuel G. Dawson

Ron Halbrook, Gospel preacher and staff writer for *Guardian of Truth Magazine*, preaches frequently on marriage, divorce and remarriage and takes the traditional position. His well-circulated sermon outline is reviewed by Samuel G. Dawson (blue text) who thinks Halbrook's position is not only wrong, but also unproven, and that even those who agree with Halbrook will be able to see that his treatment is way too simplistic. The original outline was obtained from www.truthmagazine.com.

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Introduction:

1. "The gospel of the grace of God" & of "the kingdom of God" includes "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:24-27). We do not seek to offend or to please, but to preach the gospel of Christ in its original purity and simplicity to save your soul (1 Cor. 2:2).
2. Unscriptural divorces & remarriages are a growing problem in society and in the church. Most families have shared this sorrow.
3. False theories are *spreading*. I was called to Belen, N.M. to answer the false teaching of Homer Hailey in March 1988. I had two debates with Jack Freeman in 1990. Books filled with error are circulating.
4. We must uphold the truth & refute error in order to save our homes and to save our souls (1 Pet. 4:11).

[SGD] These are admirable words, but in large part, they're being preached to people who haven't done any independent study of this subject. Before one can uphold the truth one must "know" the truth. Lutherans would write these same words to uphold the "truth" of infant sprinkling but their efforts would only serve to further their erroneous position. (James 2:24) Far better would be the open quest to uncover and understand the truth before we brand another person's position as "false teaching."

I. What The Text Teaches

A. Overview: One Man for One Woman for Life (One Exception).

[SGD] "One Exception" (a putting away for fornication) isn't true. What about death, with remarriage? That's part of the whole counsel of God. What about God commanding polygamy on certain occasions? That's part of the whole counsel of God. What about a brother marrying his sibling's widow? That's part of the whole counsel of God. All these are examples of more than one woman for life without a putting away for fornication. Nice-sounding mantra, but it's just not true. It doesn't reflect the whole counsel of God at all.

1. Jesus explained this basic rule in Matt. 19:3-9.

[SGD] Mt. 19.3-9, he didn't say or teach one man for one woman for life (one exception).

2. Jesus reaffirmed Gen. 2:24 & explained its implications.

[SGD] In Gen. 2.24 (before death existed), neither a putting away for fornication nor death broke a marriage bond. When Jesus got through with his discussion of Gen. 2.24, BOTH did! He simply did not reaffirm Gen. 2.24.

3. God's ideal in Gen. 2:24 is reflected throughout the Old Testament (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 22:22; Mal. 2:14-16).

[SGD] This is utterly ridiculous. Marriage with no divorce nor death didn't last--No death didn't last through Genesis, no divorce didn't last past Dt. 24.

4. Deut. 24:1-4 is variance legislation.

[SGD] Jesus I know and Paul I know, but what is "Variance legislation"? Dt. 24.1-4 taught divorce for fornication, and the guilty party may remarry, which Halbrook denies. Variance legislation is "speaking where the Bible speaks"?

5. God's ideal in Gen. 2:24 was *reinforced* by Christ.

[SGD] Again, this is utterly ridiculous. Marriage with no divorce nor death didn't last--No death didn't last through Genesis, no divorce didn't last past Dt. 24, much less into the gospels.

B. *What Jesus Taught in Matt. 5:32*

1. The law of Christ gives *a rule* ("Whosoever shall put away his wife...*causeth* her to commit adultery.") and *one exception* (Whosoever shall put away his wife for fornication *is not responsible* for her subsequent adultery.). This eliminates the "waiting game."

[SGD] Halbrook doesn't demonstrate where this second "whosoever" statement came from. It's not in quotation marks, so he's not quoting Jesus. He's just giving it to us for free. It's correct, and I agree with it, but it doesn't show the full effect of the exception clause. Doesn't define what the "waiting game" is. But if he's denying the right of a put-away one to divorce a fornicating spouse, I disagree, and he hasn't proved it. In such a case, Halbrook believes an ungodly man under an ungodly government can take away his wife's God-given right to put away a fornicating spouse, the whole time claiming that man's laws don't affect God's laws on this subject. Who can believe it?

2. "Jesus here limits the right of divorce to cases of unchastity....the innocent party to such a divorce can marry again. Of course, the guilty party could not, for no one is allowed by law to reap the benefits of his own wrong" (J.W. McGarvey, *Fourfold Gospel*, p. 242).

[SGD] Innocent party--everyone in Mt. 19.3-9 is innocent. There is no fornicator in the passage. What passage did McGarvey give? Do we still have Bible for what we teach, or is just quoting McGarvey enough? Is that preaching the whole counsel of God? Besides, it's just not true that "no one is allowed by law to reap the benefits of his own wrong." Could the penitent Jews in Ac. 2

benefit from their own wrong, killing Christ? Could a young girl who ran a stop sign inherit from the aunt she killed who gave her an inheritance?

3. Jesus ended the Mosaic concession of Deut. 24.

[SGD] Moses didn't concede and permit easy divorce; there is no Mosaic concession, and Halbrook never proved there was. Halbrook makes himself more stalwart than God, in that God caved in to rebellious Jews, while Halbrook wouldn't dare! Jesus said in Mt. 5.20 that he wouldn't teach different than Moses. Did he turn around and teach differently 12 verses later? Likewise, Moses permitted divorce only for fornication and the guilty party could remarry, both of which Halbrook denies.

C. *What Jesus Taught in Matt. 19:9*

1. Christ gave a *rule* ("Whosoever shall put away his wife...and shall marry another, committeth adultery.") and *one exception* (Whosoever shall put away his wife for fornication and shall marry another, doth *not* commit adultery.). What Jesus authorized & approved, we should recognize & approve, including the exception. We commend those who act upon it.

[SGD] Jesus gave no rules or new legislation in this passage, but merely reiterated Moses teaching to the Jews of his day, divorce only for fornication and both parties could remarry. Halbrook does not prove the teaching even applies to Christians. Nor does he prove the exception, which is not in quotes, reading the guilty party into the passage again. Just *ipse dixits*. You can have Halbrook's commendation for obeying his *ipse dixits*, but you'd do better to seek the Lord's!

2. "EXCEPT" has the force of "IF AND ONLY IF" (Matt. 18:3; Jn. 3:2, 5; Lk. 13:3; Matt. 19:9). Like: Whoever shoots a basketball, except it misses the hoop, scores two points.

[SGD] Not only is Halbrook's teaching not based on Jesus', his example isn't even true. Suppose it's a three-point shot! Suppose it's a foul shot! What about if the shot is taken after the bell rings? What about...

D. *How Jesus Defined Adultery (Conform Our Thinking to His).*

1. *All cases* of divorce & remarriage result in adultery, with only *one exception*.

[SGD] Hasn't demonstrated. Contradicts Moses in Dt. 24.1-4, Jesus in Mt. 5.32, 19.9, Paul in I Cor. 7.11, 15. Paul gave God's definition of adultery in Rom. 7.2, and it doesn't fit Halbrook's theory.

2. We may hear, "Divorce is tragic, but once it happens, both parties are free to marry another mate." Not so! All divorced people remain under *the constraint of divine law*.

[SGD] I've never said the first part in the case of treacherous divorce, and I agree with Halbrook's answer. However, not only all "divorced people," but also everyone is under such constraint. Where are the propositions Halbrook usually debates part of divine law? That's the problem.

3. Some cases of adultery are *simple*; others are *complex* because sin is added to sin. "The remarriage of a man after divorcing his wife, or the remarrying of the divorced woman, is tantamount to adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9)" (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV:733).

[SGD] Jesus didn't say treacherous divorce and remarriage was tantamount to adultery, he said it was adultery. What about if the first spouse dies. Halbrook probably says the other can remarry. Is that adultery? I doubt that Halbrook thinks so.

4. "Adultery" must be defined by the use Jesus made of the term: *unlawful sexualintercourse involving someone under the constraint of God's marriage law*.

[SGD] Bad definition of adultery. Doesn't agree with God's definition in Rom. 7.2-3. Adultery was defined centuries before Jesus came into the world, and he didn't redefine it. Halbrook's definition of adultery wasn't heard of before the 1980s. "With the spouse of another" -- Halbrook uses it to refer to someone under the constraint of Halbrook's marriage law.

E. *What 1 Cor. 7 Teaches*

1. False teachers claim vv. 2, 9, 27-28 allow the put-away fornicator or the unscripturally divorced person to marry another mate, but v. 2 says "*his own wife*" (not another wife),

[SGD] Is a put-away fornicator the wife of anyone? Who is his own wife? If his wife put him away for his fornication and remarries, is she still the "own wife" of the fornicator?

vv. 8-9 is to "*the unmarried & widows*" (not divorcees),

[SGD] Aren't put-away fornicators unmarried?

and the "loosed" or free man in vv. 27-28 is the male counterpart to "*a virgin*" (i.e. never married).

[SGD] And who is a never-married man loosed from? Is a virgin correctly defined by "never married"?

2. False teachers claim that though an unscriptural divorce is tragic, each party is then "single" & free to marry another mate. Vv. 10-11 prove that theory is false.

[SGD] I disagree with the first sentence, and agree with Halbrook's use of vv.10-11 in the case of treacherous divorce.

3. False teachers claim v. 15 permits a believer deserted by an unbeliever to marry a new mate. We are "not under bondage" to give up Christ to please our mate, but that does *not* mean we are no longer married & can marry another mate (cf.v.23).

[SGD] So this is the same solution as vv. 10-11, although Paul said it was a case that Jesus hadn't dealt with. No. Different situation, different answer. Halbrook has different situation, same answer.

F. *Summary: How We Know When It Is Right to Marry Another Mate.*

1. The Bible plainly says we can marry "*another*" mate *if* our mate dies (Rom. 7:2-3) or *if* we put away our mate "for fornication" (Matt. 19:9).

[SGD] Halbrook has now contradicted his first point in this sermon, that God's ideal is one man for one woman for life, by affirming a second spouse after the death of the first. Also, he hasn't demonstrated remarriage after a divorce for fornication, and the sermon is almost over. He's just recited the mantra. "For fornication" isn't in Mt. 19.9. The quotation marks don't apply to Mt. 19.9, for Jesus said "except for fornication." Halbrook says "for fornication." Which should we believe? Halbrook vs. Jesus-- easy choice! Also, there's another passage that applies that plainly says: "Art thou loosed from a wife, seek not a wife. But shouldest thou marry, thou hast not sinned."

2. Where does the Bible authorize the put-away fornicator or the unscripturally divorced person to marry *another* mate?

[SGD] Fornicator: Dt. 24.1-4, Mt. 5.20 (where Jesus affirmed he would teach the same as Moses), Mt. 5.32 (by necessary implication), Mt. 19.9 (by necessary implication), I Cor. 7.2, I Cor. 7.27-28. Unscripturally divorced person whose former spouse commits adultery or remarries, Mt. 19.9 (by necessary implication).

II. Why We Must Preach & Practice What The Text Teaches (What Is At Stake)

A. Scriptural Authority & Unity

1. When God *specified one thing* out of a class of things, He *excludes all other things* in that class (Gen. 6:14; Matt. 19:9 **specifies** the innocent mate can put away the guilty party & marry "another.")

[SGD] Mt. 19.9 doesn't specify anything about a putting away for fornication--it specifies about a putting away except for fornication. There is no guilty party in Mt. 19.3-9. Jesus specified absolutely nothing about a guilty party! Anything this passage teaches about divorce for fornication must be necessarily implied, and Halbrook hasn't demonstrated such an implication at all.

2. Unity is based upon truth when we preach & practice *what is clearly stated* in the text of Scripture (Jn. 17:17-21).

[SGD] There is nothing clearly stated about a divorce for fornication--it must be demonstrated by necessary implication. Halbrook breaks unity on something not clearly stated and that he never proves!

Human theories depart from the Bible & thus cause division.

[SGD] Human theories are what Halbrook is preaching, and division is what he is causing. Halbrook's right!

Immersion is the unity ground (Acts 8:38), but sprinkling causes division (pervert Acts 16:15). We agree the innocent mate can put away the fornicator and marry another (Matt. 19:9),

[SGD] We agree on this, but Halbrook hasn't proved it. The same process he uses to prove this also proves the guilty party may remarry.

but human theories cause division by claiming others can divorce & remarry.

[SGD] Which Halbrook is causing. Was Moses causing division when he specifically said the put-away fornicator could remarry? Was Jesus causing division when he taught the same as Moses? Was Paul causing division when he taught the same as Jesus and Moses? As a matter of fact, Halbrook surely believes that a put away fornicator may remarry, if the first wife will just die. He probably also believes the put-away fornicator may remarry her first spouse.

3. The restoration plea for scriptural authority resulted in scriptural unity during the first century & again during the 1800s. This was true on marriage, divorce, & remarriage (Ed Harrell, *Quest for a Christian America*, pp. 197-198).

[SGD] If Halbrook agrees with those in the 1800s, then he agrees with McGarvey that the put-away fornicator may remarry, agrees with Walter Scott, and Alexander Campbell, and R. L. Whiteside who took Bales' position, with David Lipscomb who didn't advise couples to split up. Either this is true, or Halbrook is flat wrong in claiming there was scriptural unity on this subject in the 1800s. Which is it?

4. Sam Dawson (*Fellowship on Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage*) charges those who preach the truth & expose error with causing division, but those who *introduce error* cause it.

[SGD] Sam Dawson's booklet didn't even deal with the truth on MDR, just poorly qualified preachers who were inciting a split.

B. *The Purity of the Church*

1. When we open the door to *one* false theory, we open the door to *all*.

[SGD] This as well applies to Halbrook's false, unproven theory as to any other false theory.

Spin the theory wheel of error & win an unscriptural mate every time! *Put-away fornicator can marry a new mate* (Bob Melear, Jack Freeman, Lowell Williams, et. al.).

[SGD] ...Moses, Jesus, and Paul

If unbeliever leaves, believer can get a new mate (James Bales, Jerry & Don Bassett, et. al.).

[SGD] ...Paul

Matt. 19:9 is "kingdom law" & does not apply to the world (E.C. Fuqua; Homer Hailey, et. al.). *Baptism sanctifies an adulterous marriage* (Roy Hall, J.L. Dabney, et. al.). *Redefine adultery as non-sexual* (Olan Hicks, Jim Puterbaugh, et.al.).

2. Ed Harrell says Rom. 14 allows us to tolerate "contradictory teachings & practices on important moral & doctrinal questions" such as divorce & remarriage (*Christianity Magazine*, Nov. 1988, pp. 6-9; Apr. 1989, p. 6; May 1989, p. 6; May 1990, p. 6). But differences in Rom. 14 are in the realm where "*all things are pure*" (v. 20). 2 Jn. 9-11 says we cannot compromise with departures

from the doctrine of Christ. To compromise the truth at *one* point opens the door to digression & apostasy of every kind!

[SGD] Yet Halbrook is in fellowship with some of those who disagree with positions he sets forth in debates.

C. *The Salvation of Souls*

1. False teachers say they can baptize more people with their theories, but salvation requires true repentance (Acts 2:38). If we steal a man's watch, car, & wife, how do we show true repentance: *return* them or *keep* them?

2. In cases of unscriptural marriage, the Bible requires *true repentance* (Ezra 10; Mk.6:18; Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 5).

[SGD] Ezra 10 broke up international marriages, not adulterous ones. This passage has nothing to do with our subject. Mk. 6.18 broke up incestuous marriages, not adulterous ones. This passage has nothing to do with our subject. I agree with Mt. 5.32 and Mt. 19.9, which taught the same as Moses, though Halbrook denies it. True repentance has to do with one's relationship with God, not his right to have a spouse. I Cor. 5 deals with a man who had his father's wife, with not even a divorce involved. We would teach the same thing Halbrook does, so it has nothing to do with our subject.

3. Some ask, "If God forgives all sin, why doesn't He forgive people in unscriptural marriages & allow them to stay married?" Past sins are forgiven, but we *cannot continue* the sinful practice. Also, forgiveness *does not remove the temporal consequences* of sin (Acts 25:11; Lk. 23:40-43; Lk. 15:13; Matt. 19:9).

D. *Preservation of Marriage, Morality, & Homes*

1. History proves when men relax God's law on divorce & remarriage, "The flood gates are open," & "We invite the very evils we seek to remedy" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, II:865-866). The results have always been careless marriages, divorce for any cause, & multiplied miseries!

[SGD] When Moses taught the put-away fornicator could remarry, did he relax God's law? Halbrook says yes. I deny it emphatically. Did Moses open the flood gates? Did Jesus when he taught the same as Moses? Did Paul when he taught the same as Jesus? Do I when I teach the same as Moses, Jesus, and Paul? We also open the flood gates when men make laws God didn't.

2. *False theories invite, encourage, & defend sin in the church today.* A preacher's wife "confessed" adultery, but wanted to marry the man & remain in the church. A young lady was told to be "rebaptized" to get out of her marriage. A believer deserted a believer, & was told this was grounds for a new marriage. Two deacons swapped wives, "repented", and were received back into the church with their new mates.

[SGD] Agreed. False theories invite, encourage, & defend sin in the church today, whether taught by Halbrook or others.

3. God has entrusted to us the precious souls of our children. We are responsible to teach & train them properly, otherwise we *share the blame* for the wreck & ruin of their lives.

Conclusion:

Our choice: God or Satan (Gen.2:17; 3:4; Mk. 16:16).

(For further study, see *Halbrook-Freeman Debate*, & tract & booklets by Halbrook: *Honorable Marriage; Trends Pointing Toward A New Apostasy; Understanding the Controversy*; contact Truth Bookstore, 1-800-428-0121)

[SGD] (For further study, see also *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: The Uniform Teaching of Moses, Jesus, and Paul* by Samuel G. Dawson; contact SGDPress, 300 E. Tarrant, Bowie, TX 76230, or www.SGDPress.com.)

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