

DISCUSSION BETWEEN EDDIE WHITTEN AND DUB MCCLISH ON MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

[Note: Eddie Whitten, a brother in Christ sent his first letter to Dub McClish by regular mail. It was undated, but was postmarked May 4, 2005.]

F. E. (Eddie) Whitten
1102 N. Paseo De Golf
Green Valley, AZ 85614

Mr. Dub McClish
908 Imperial Dr.
Denton, TX 76209

Dear Dub:

It has been some time since I have communicated with you. The last I heard was that Lavonne's cancer was in remission for which I am extremely glad. I know the prospects forebode that it will return, but I sincerely hope that the remission will be long-lasting. You are in my thoughts and prayers.

I received a disconcerting e-mail yesterday from Paul Ditoro. He related that his daughter, Sandy Tipton, who worships at Northeast, was disturbed over information which indicated that you and David [Brown] had some "strange ideas about MDR." I responded to Paul that I had known for several years that David took the position that a civil divorce, not for the cause of fornication, did not preclude subsequent remarriage if adultery was committed later. I have discussed this issue with David on a couple of occasions, one being at my house when David was attending some classes in Dallas, and stayed with me.

I also knew that Lynn Parker, Michael Hatcher and Terry Hightower also held this view, but I was really taken aback when I found that you do, too! Now, David and Lynn are really pushing this view and are out in the open about it. The April [2005] issue of CFTF is very plain. David classifies anyone who disagrees with his view as "workers for the Devil." I am so very sorry that on that basis, I had no choice but to write to David and cancel my subscription to CFTF on the basis of protest of his, in my judgment, rash statement. In making such a

statement, he categorically condemns most of the sound preachers I know that have always held that fornication had to be the cause of yes, the civil divorce as per Matthew 5:32.

The basis that a civil law overrides God's law in the case of civil divorce is completely unfounded. God joins a couple in marriage per Matthew 19:6, but only in view of the civil ceremony. Otherwise, fornication would constitute marriage. Men disobey God's law, and in doing so subject themselves to the consequences of their action. "Put away," or "putting away" refers to civil divorce, does it not? Jesus says then, "Whosoever divorces his wife in a civil action, except for the *cause* of fornication, and marries another commits adultery." I never heard of this new wrinkle until just four or five years ago!

Dub, I implore you to study about this some more if, indeed, you have taken their view. I wrote David that his pushing this position is no less devastating and divisive to the church as [sic] Mac Deaver's Holy Spirit hobby. I also expressed my dismay that even though I consider him a dear friend, I could have no fellowship with that kind of error since it is [sic] a matter of salvation involved.

I know the friendship you have enjoyed for so many years with all those I have named in this letter. Those same folk have been my friends for anywhere from 20 to 40 years, but I have had to choose between my friends and what the Bible says. If I lose such close friends, that is what I will have to do, but I cannot go against what the Bible teaches.

As a source of my information, and with his permission, I contacted Tommy Hicks yesterday to confirm the report that you were taking this erroneous position. I did not want to trouble you in the light of Lavonne's problems and the taxation of your time if this rumor was not true. He does not take that position, and I know very few who do. I know that Jim Boyd does and probably several others, but, for the most part, I am persuaded that most of the sound brethren that you and I have known so long do not.

I personally believe that you will do yourself irreparable harm to pursue this invention. You have put in too much time, too much effort and too much of your reputation as a sound Bible student and faithful Gospel preacher to have your life's work destroyed by the stroke of a pen such as has happened to Roy Dearer [sic], James D. Bales and others who have gone astray. Please don't let this happen to you, my dear friend.

The future of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL* hinges to a very great degree upon the path you take.

Yours, very concerned, Eddie

[Dub McClish responded to Eddie Whitten as follows by e-mail.]

June 4, 2005

Mr. Eddie Whitten
1102 N. Paseo De Golf
Green Valley, AZ 85614

Dear Eddie:

Thank you for your kind thoughts about Lavonne in your letter of May 4. She and I both appreciate them. I also appreciate your brotherly and obviously sincere concern over what you perceive to be my erroneous position on MDR. Knowing her only on a very casual basis, I do not know what Paul's daughter had heard relative to my holding "some strange ideas about MDR" (or from whom she may have heard them) or what she might consider "strange ideas" on the subject to be.

I need to respond to many things in your letter. I hope that I can do so frankly and openly, yet as a gentleman, and not in such a way as to acerbate this already highly-charged controversy among faithful brethren. This is my sincere intent. Let me first say that I have not "taken the view" of David, Lynn, Michael, Terry, or anyone else, but I simply believe what I believe because I am convinced that it is the teaching of Scripture. I have no hesitancy to say that my view of the matters about which you wrote is in agreement with those named (and with quite a few other brethren who have distinguished themselves as being anything but liberals or heretics)—insofar as I am familiar with their convictions. However, you seem to be under the impression that my friendship with them may have influenced me or that my convictions resulted from some sort of political expediency in relation to them. Did I base my "convictions" on long-time friendships and relationships with brethren, I would still be at Pearl Street and never would have had to go through the meat grinder those men put me through. Your innuendo in this regard hardly deserves a response, especially from a trusted friend of many years. Surely, you are aware that I have many, many dear and trusted friends (including you) who do not agree with me on this facet of the MDR issue.

Now I am confused: First, you imply that I may have formulated my position out of political expediency, then you turn around and encourage me to change my views on the basis of political expediency—by issuing an ominous warning (in the close of your letter) that my position may jeopardize the future of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*. Just for the record, I do not

arrive at my convictions from such motivations. Eddie, it is beneath you even to think such a thing of me. I thought you had more respect for me than to imply such.

I do not know precisely how long ago I came to the conclusions you find so “disconcerting,” but it was well over 20 years, which is likely longer ago than some of those you named have held them. Believe it or not, it is still possible (even for a light-weight such as I) to arrive at conclusions concerning Scripture through my own study. I was saddened that several of your remarks were condescending in tone, though I grant that you might not have intended them so. Your letter immediately reminded me of a letter from Gary Colley when he first learned several years ago that I believe in the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He first expressed great shock and disappointment, then said he would “defend me the best he could” whenever my convictions on the matter were discussed in his presence. I appreciated his generous offer, but I did not really feel that either my position or that I personally needed a defense or apology from him or anyone else. My position on the indwelling is neither liberal nor heretical, as he implied. I am of the same conviction concerning my view of the MDR issue, which has apparently shocked you.

You suggested that I do some more study. I have actually done much study on this subject through the years, but I have also done more study and research since receiving your letter, some of which my remaining comments will reflect. You are obviously very upset with David [Brown], especially. I do not need to defend him, for he is quite capable of defending his own words and actions. However, I must say that, upon reading your letter, I could not recall his using any such terminology as “workers of the devil” in regard to those with whom he differs on MDR (although this term is surely apropos for the liberals who have created endless loopholes so as to overturn Matthew 19:9). Just in case I may have missed it, I reread the April *CFTF*, and I could find no such expression. If I have overlooked it, I will stand corrected. However, if he did not use such terminology, then your accusation, rather than his non-existent statement, constitutes a “rash statement,” yea, a false statement. Perhaps you meant that you inferred from his words that he thinks that those who disagree with him are “workers of the devil,” but you put the words in quotes, indicating that they were David’s words.

You accused David and Lynn of “really pushing” this view and of coming “out in the open about it,” as if Lynn’s Spring lecture [i.e., February 2005] and the April *CFTF* were the first words they had uttered on the subject or that they had been secretive about their convictions. This reaction surprised me in light of the recent history of this controversy. Let me refresh your memory. In about 1990, Jimmy Parker (Lynn’s uncle who several years ago withdrew from Lynn over this very issue, as you perhaps know) was really pressuring Jerry Moffitt to debate this

matter that has suddenly become so explosive. When I learned that Jerry was considering doing so, I called him and begged him not to, believing it would be unnecessarily divisive. I also assured him that those of us whom he wants to debate believe in the one exception of fornication as strongly as he does. Jerry thought it over and relented, and as far as I know, had not mentioned the matter publicly again until his remarks at the Southwest Lectures last year (and why he felt compelled to then, I have no idea, especially in light of his comments I will mention below). Others may have cautioned him about a debate on the subject besides me, but he has thanked me more than once through the years for talking him out of any such debate challenges. The issue was not being pushed from either “side” in the interim so far as I know until brethren with whom you are in agreement began writing articles on the subject a few years ago, which implied, at least, that any who agree with the position I hold are liberals and unworthy of fellowship.

As far back as 1989, Jim Mettenbrink (see below) wrote an article, supposedly in response to the late Guy N. Woods’ comments on this subject in his Q & A, vol. 2, book (pp. 45–46). As far as I know, no one made any public response to the Mettenbrink article for thirteen years—not until 2002 (again, see below). Then Jim Waldron jumped into this issue with all four feet a few years ago, with his straw man “waiting game” accusations and (in my judgment) unnecessarily harsh rhetoric. (For some insight into Jim’s autocratic, domineering personality, you might talk with some of the folks who have had to deal with him on the mission field [e.g., Asghar Ali [Pakistan], Dorsey Traw [Thailand], et al.] He has seemed determined to demonize anyone who held any other view than his (and yours, as demonstrated by his use of your “Waiting Game” article). Only then, as I have been able to piece things together, did David begin to make some response. Surely, you read the articles by Don Tarbet, Guy N. Woods, Robert Taylor, and David (quoting McGarvey and Boles), in the November 2001 *CFTF*—an issue that carried one of your many regular columns (pp. 23–24). You thereby had to know (at that point, if not before) David’s convictions, but this knowledge did not deter you from continuing to write your “The Last Word” columns for *CFTF*. Did you voice your concern that he was “really pushing” this matter or that he had come “out in the open about it” then? You and I were in very close and frequent contact during all this time, but I do not recall your expressing any concern to me about these articles or this doctrine that you now are unable to fellowship “since it is a matter of salvation involved.”

You apparently did not read the September 2002 *CFTF* very closely, for it contained a lengthy editorial by David, a lengthy article by Lynn, a reprint of the aforementioned article by Jim Mettenbrink, followed by a response to the Mettenbrink article by Terry Hightower—all on

MDR. Moreover, you should not have been surprised to hear only very lately of my convictions of this subject, for Terry named me, among several others besides himself, in his 2002 article, who thus believe. I cannot believe that you did not read that issue of *CFTF*, for Paul Vaughn featured you in his column (pp. 19–20). Again, you must not have been overly concerned about David’s convictions, for you continued to write your “The Last Word” column through December 2002. But, more recently, you had no problem accepting the dedication of the Spring Lectureship book to you in February 2003, yet you had to know well before that time that David held the position, which you now find so reprehensible. Additionally, you seemed to have no problem accepting the dedication of the Bellview book to you in 2003, yet you had to know by then, also, that Michael held this “erroneous” MDR view. I am curious to know the reason(s) our convictions on this subject so suddenly became a damnable doctrine and a fellowship issue.

Where was the outrage—from you or others who seem now to be so upset—when Jim Waldron began “really pushing” his (and your) view and of coming “out in the open about it” a few years ago? He was so determined to push “his view” that he split the church in Dunlap, TN, which resulted in his having to move to Crossville. If information one of the eye-witnesses has supplied me concerning this sad situation is correct, the “straw that broke the camel’s back” at Dunlap was your “The Waiting Game” article that Jim had printed in his June 2003 *Bulletin Briefs* to mail to a long list of brethren. I was sorely disappointed when I saw your article in his material. (Someone [I cannot recall who] indicated to me soon after your article appeared that you even expressed regret that Jim had published it.) Apparently, some of the brethren at Dunlap were also very disappointed in it and did not agree either with your article, with Jim’s combative tactics and his position on this subject, or with his sending that mailing in the name—and at the expense—of the Dunlap Church.

Further, they could foresee the completely unnecessary firestorm it would cause to mail this material all over the brotherhood. Thus that mailing was canceled, and the eventual fallout was a division at Dunlap and Jim’s move to Crossville. Surely, Jim knew that several faithful brethren did not agree with his position a long time before he decided to launch his offensive, but he seemed not to care about the unnecessary disruptions it would cause. An eyewitness at Crossville has also told me that Jim’s first attempt to flood the brotherhood with his material after he moved was blocked by the Crossville elders, but he now seems to have them in his pocket. Moreover, he had never before beat the drums of “disfellowship” over this issue of which I am aware, but he most definitely is now beating them, as you doubtless know. When asked about brother Woods’ position, he has replied that if brother Woods were still alive, he (Jim) would

have to withdraw from him. Do you agree with this dictum, Eddie? I do not know about you, but I view that as radicalism gone to seed.

Whether or not Jim's campaign emboldened some others, I know not. However, it is at least coincidental that there has been somewhat of a rash of public proclamations from his (and your) perspective pens/tongues in the last couple of years. Note the following:

1. **March 2002:** Stan Crowley launched an attack against Tim Kidwell at Buda-Kyle over this very issue (David refers to this occurrence in his April editorial, but I was informed of it by one who was involved in it as it was happening.) Stan was still a Southwest student at the time, but was still a member at B-K. He publicly marked Tim as a false teacher for simply agreeing with brother Woods' statement, and Stan provoked a "church trial" over it (B-K had no elders). Reportedly, he received pressure from some source (rumor has it that his upcoming graduation might have been jeopardized) so he backed off, deciding (conveniently) that perhaps it was not a Heaven or Hell issue after all. However, he succeeded in dividing and causing great grief to brethren there by his behavior, which things he still has not made right with Tim or the other brethren he harmed.
2. **October 2003:** Monte Evans delivered a lecture at Cedar Bayou that advocated "Jim's doctrine" (for lack of a better term; I intend no offense).
3. **January 2004:** Stan Crowley delivered a lecture at Beeville in which, by an extremely circuitous route (abusing both linguistics and Scripture), he arrived at the Jim Waldron conclusion. I have been told by some who agree with Jim that they are not able to stomach Crowley's argumentation on the matter.
4. **April 2004:** Jerry Moffitt delivered a lecture on MDR at Southwest, in which he referred to those who disagree with the Waldron (and his and your) position by the pejorative term as those who play "the waiting game." He also ridiculed the idea that not all marriages and/or divorces authorized by civil courts are such "in God's eyes" (a phrase that definitely embodies a Scriptural concept [Isa. 55:8-9, et al.]).

We who disagree with the Waldron (and your) position have not been on the offensive on this subject through tracts, newsletters, and lectures (except the responses to attacks in *CFTF* as already noted). As far as I know, Lynn's lecture last February was the first lecture in many years that has addressed this controversy from the perspective you oppose. (The only previous one devoted wholly to the subject of which I am aware was Terry Hightower's at FSOP Lectures way back in 1996. Besides Terry's lecture, I know of only the following coming from

our side of the issue: Jackie Stearsman wrote a brief article (5 pp.) on this subject and published it in the 1999 FSOP book, but he did not deliver a lecture on it. Robert Taylor stated our view of this matter concisely in the course of answering a question on MDR in a Q & A forum at Beeville Lectures in 2001 [He does not believe that our position is any sort of “invention,” as you have characterized it].) Yet, suddenly, in the span of one year, there were four such incidents, three of them full-fledged lectures, from folks with whom you agree.

Did Jim (and did you) not know that responses were inevitable to such actions? Are we who have been maligned as false teachers and unworthy of fellowship supposed to sit by silently? Surely, you did not expect us to say nothing in response to the accusation that we advocate the erroneous “waiting game,” when we do not, either implicitly or explicitly, and when several of us have repeatedly gone to some lengths to oppose that sinful practice? Must we be quiet while others mislead brethren to believe that God honors every marriage and/or divorce authorized by civil courts, when the Scriptures make it so clear that He does not? Again, Eddie, where was your outrage when those with whom you agree on this issue were increasingly ratcheting up the pressure and the rhetoric? To expect no response, or to cry “foul” when the response has come, is not very realistic, to say the least.

Perhaps some on both sides of this controversy have used unnecessarily strong terminology in recent discussions. However, it is certainly unfair to lay it all on one person or one “side.” I was not at Spring, but I have listened to a recording of Lynn’s speech. Personally, I cannot hear the meanness in Lynn’s speech that some profess to hear. Had he been reviewing a Lucado or Deaver speech, he would likely have been applauded by all who have criticized him.

I have also heard David’s comments after Lynn’s speech. From the reports of some (before I actually heard his words), I was expecting them to be far stronger than I found them to be. Some have accused him of trying to divide the church over this issue. We do not merely have to accuse some on your side of this controversy of division. As already noted, some have already divided congregations over this doctrine (i.e., Jim Waldron and Stan Crowley). If brethren generally follow their extremism, there will be many more unnecessary divisions over this issue. Surely, brethren who have thus charged David and Lynn, but have given Jim and Stan a pass, are simply not aware of the history of those who have been zealously exercising this issue over the past 3 or 4 years, or they are exceedingly biased in their judgment.

If I understand you, you do not want to be accused of arguing that civil law prevails concerning MDR, regardless of what Divine law states—namely that God approvingly

recognizes whatever marriage or divorce rulings the state issues. In other words, if two people are married according to civil law, God not only takes note of that marriage, but He does so with His approval—period, and if a court grants a divorce (on whatever grounds), God honors that divorce, thus dissolving the marriage. Does God approve of all “marriages” of which human laws approve (Mark 6:17–18)? Does God dissolve all marriages that civil courts dissolve through divorce? I believe these two questions get to the heart of this issue. Certainly, where civil laws exist that are in harmony with Divine laws (on MDR or any other subject), we must comply with them (Rom. 13, et al.).

However, to say that “God joins a couple in marriage per Matthew 19:6, but only in view of the civil ceremony,” is far too broad a statement. Jesus went all the way back to Adam and Eve to illustrate God’s all-time law on MDR in this very context. According to your sweeping generalization on what constitutes a marriage, God could not have approved their relationship as a marriage, for no “civil authority” then existed to conduct a “civil ceremony.” When God brought Eve to Adam, did He thus encourage them to engage in fornication (remember, you said that “fornication would constitute marriage” if there is no civil ceremony)? Did they have to commit fornication in order to obey God’s charge to “be fruitful and multiply”? Should they from the beginning have been ashamed in their nakedness because they were not married “in view of the civil ceremony”? If you argue that Adam and Eve were an exceptional case, then what about their posterity over the next few generations? (Who knows how many generations went by before there was any civil law governing marriage?)

Suppose one lived in a nation that passed a law forbidding all future marriages, contradicting God’s decree that marriage is the only right and honorable circumstance for sexual unions and procreation (1 Cor. 7:2; Heb. 13:4)? Would this mean that a man and a woman, eligible “in God’s eyes” to marry, could not marry? I say they could, even in the absence of civil law. What do you say? Again, suppose a nation passed a law that dissolved all marriages in effect at the time. Would a Scripturally married husband and wife in this circumstance no longer be married “in God’s eyes”? Would they commit fornication the next time they had sexual relations? I say they would still be married and their subsequent sexual unions would not constitute fornication. What do you say? If civil law is the only controlling factor in marriage and divorce, one is forced to label their copulation as “fornication.”

Further, were the homosexuals in San Francisco, Boston, and New York state “married” by Bible definition (i.e., “in God’s eyes”—did God honor these couplings as marriages) when the civil authorities in those places issued them licenses and performed their “wedding”

ceremonies? If God binds Himself to whatever the state decides to do concerning marriage and divorce, then by implication we have no basis upon which to object to such “marriages.” Moreover, if He does so, He has surrendered His infallible will to the fallible, mutable, and territorial laws of men. It seems apparent that you want to have it both ways. On the one hand, you correctly do not want to be in the position of elevating the laws of men above the law of God, because you know that this is grievous error (Dan. 3:1–18; Acts 5:29; et al.). On the other hand, the position you are arguing clearly implies that, in these MDR issues, you are making God’s law subject to the unscriptural laws of the state and/or decrees of the courts. Surely you understand that God does not honor every marriage granted by the state (if you say He does, reread the foregoing material and think about it some more). If He does, there could be no such a thing as an “adulterous marriage.”

Since you asked me about divorce, I now turn my attention to that subject. Does God sanction a divorce (i.e., dissolve a marriage) every time a court grants one? Herodias had a civil-law divorce from Phillip when she married Herod Antipas, who had likewise obtained a civil-law divorce from his wife of several years in order to marry Herodias. Obviously, God did not honor Herodias’ divorce from Philip, otherwise Mark would not have called her “his brother Philip’s wife” (6:17). “But,” someone inquires, “does not this verse also say of Antipas and Herodias, “he had married her?” The verse undeniably acknowledges that a “marriage” in some sense had taken place. They were, in fact, free to marry each other **according to civil law**, for both of them had **legally** divorced their original mates. However, just as obviously, the **legal** marriage of the two by civil law was an **illegal** marriage before God, as the context immediately reveals: “For John said unto Herod, It is **not lawful** for thee to have thy brother’s wife” (v. 18, emph. DM). Since by civil law their marriage was lawful, John could only have meant that by God’s law their marriage was not lawful.

These facts demand the conclusion that Mark used the term *married* in a colloquial sense, that is, accommodatively. While by civil law they were “married,” John knew that by God’s law they were not. As indicated above, historians tell us that both Herodias and Antipas had divorced their respective mates before they married each other. While there may have been more than one reason their “marriage” was not lawful before God, no other reason is needed besides the fact that their divorces were not lawful before God. Herodias was still “Philip’s wife” by God’s law (Mark 6:17), and it was not lawful (by God’s law) for Antipas to have his “brother’s wife” (v. 18). Although the text does not say so explicitly, by implication, before God, Antipas was still morally and spiritually bound to his first wife. In other words, it was not lawful for

Herodias to have her husband's (Philip's) brother (Antipas). God did not approve of the marriage of Antipas and Herodias for the very reason that He did not approve of their respective divorces.

Now, consider these principles in some more contemporary persons. Joe divorces Jane because he finds Mary more attractive (no fornication involved at this juncture). The divorce decree (civil law) says that the marriage no longer exists, freeing Joe legally to marry Mary. What does God say? Is Joe free to marry Mary Scripturally? In Matthew 19:9, the Lord by implication teaches that Joe and Jane are still married, although the civil-law divorce says that they are not. Would Joe's marriage to Mary be an adulterous marriage or a Divinely sanctioned one? If Joe and Jane were not still bound to one another by God's moral and spiritual marriage law (in spite of the civil divorce decree), why would Joe's marriage to Mary constitute adultery—adultery against Jane, in fact, whom he divorced without Scriptural cause (Mark 10:11)? Here we have a marriage which men say is allowable, but which God says is forbidden—because it constitutes adultery. Robert Taylor summarized it precisely in his 2001 remarks at Beeville: “What might be done in civil government doesn't always coincide with God's law. A marriage might end in the courthouse and yet might not end in the sight of the Lord at all.”

The foregoing series of statements leads me to emphasize the one exception Jesus gave that can break the absolute permanency of a God-ordained marriage short of death. We both know that the one exception is fornication. Now, revisit the case of Joe, Jane, and Mary with me.

1. Joe sought and obtained a civil-law divorce from Jane, with no fornication involved on the part of either. At this point, on the basis of Matthew 19:9 and related verses, neither of them can remarry with God's approval, for to do so would be to commit adultery. This is so in spite of the civil-law divorce, because by Divine law they are still married/bound to one another. Surely, you agree. Their only marriage option in the present circumstance is reconciliation (1 Cor. 7:11). Jane did not want the divorce and sought to prevent it. She sought reconciliation to Joe, but he would have none of it. Another way of looking at it is to say that **legally** the marriage of Joe and Jane has been dissolved, but **Scripturally** (in God's eyes—there's that pesky, but Scriptural, phrase again!) it is still intact (because neither of them has died or committed fornication). As far as God is concerned, the divorce decree involving Joe and Jane is no more than a blank piece of paper. They are merely separated **from** each other, but still bound **to** each other, as far as God is concerned.

2. Remember, however, that Joe was already smitten with Mary before the divorce, which attraction was the reason he divorced Jane. Joe now legally marries Mary, and they both thereby become adulterers (regardless of **her** eligibility to be married) as they engage in sexual unions (Mat. 19:9). Would you agree that this “marriage,” while **legal**, is merely a “marriage on paper” (as was the divorce), but not a marriage at all according to God’s law (as with Antipas and Herodias)? Joe and Mary are actually engaging in fornication, although their relationship is authorized by civil law.

3. Jane did nothing to bring about the divorce. As already noticed, she sought to **prevent** the divorce. She tried to be **reconciled** to Joe and would have forgiven him, but he refused. By marrying Mary, Joe committed fornication, the very ground upon which an innocent spouse may be Scripturally free from the original marriage bond and free to marry again (of course, fornication does not in **itself** dissolve a marriage, but it gives the offended party the **right** to dissolve it and remarry). Jane is an innocent victim, the very one to whom the Lord’s statement gives the right to remarry. However, she cannot now obtain a divorce, for legally, Joe has already done that; the civil authorities no longer recognize Joe as still being her husband (although God still does). However, as we have already seen, the legal divorce Joe obtained is meaningless before God. Matthew 19:9 gives Jane the moral and Scriptural right to accept—because of Joe’s fornication—the divorce Joe earlier obtained. The marriage is thus **Scripturally** ended, giving Jane the **Scriptural** right to remarry, if she chooses. (Anyone who accuses that which I have described above as “the waiting game”—which I reject as strongly as you do—has more problems than I am capable of solving.)

4. That (1) Jane did not obtain a civil-law divorce from Joe, (2) neither Joe nor Jane had committed fornication at the time the civil-law divorce was granted, (3) the divorce papers did not specify “fornication” as the cause for the divorce, or (4) that Joe’s fornication did not occur until after the meaningless (to God) “paper” divorce was granted **are all irrelevant**, for the Lord honored neither Joe’s and Jane’s divorce nor Joe’s and Mary’s marriage. What the Lord **did** take knowledge of was Joe’s fornication, giving Jane the right to remarry. To say that Jane does not have the right to remarry is to exalt human/civil law above Divine law. To deprive Jane of the right to remarry represents placing more emphasis on the **timing** of the act of fornication than on the **act itself**. Surely, this cannot be correct exegesis.

I reemphasize that the exception does **not** consist of:

1. The acquiring of a civil-law divorce decree when fornication **has not** been committed by either party

2. The acquiring of a civil-law divorce decree that fails to identify fornication on the part of the defendant, even though the defendant had committed fornication
3. The **timing** of the civil-law divorce decree in relation to the commission of fornication.

The exception that allows Scriptural divorce and remarriage for the spouse who has been sinned against is **the act of fornication itself** on the part of one's mate.

I was amazed that you would not only arbitrarily limit *put away* (ASV) in Matthew 19:9 to "civil" divorce, but then actually insert your interpretation into Jesus' words in quotation marks, as if he actually said them. I would not presume to take such liberties, and I will be surprised if this insertion does not come back to haunt you. I will also be surprised if at least some of those who, while agreeing with you on this facet of MDR, still would not dare thus to tamper with the Lord's words. It is one thing to express a conviction on the meaning of a passage. It is quite another to rewrite it to fit what one believes. I find it ironic that you call my conviction on this issue a "new wrinkle" and an "invention," but that you have no problem blithely rewriting Jesus' statement in Matthew 19:9. Do you not realize that, by your dictum on divorce, it would be impossible for anyone to Scripturally divorce and remarry in the U.S., except in a mere handful of states that still allow a divorce to be granted, stating "fornication" or "adultery" as the cause?

That you never heard of what you consider to be this damnable error until four or five years ago (at which time you apparently did not consider it to be "damnable error") says more about your failure to keep up than it does about the oldness or newness of our position. I have already mentioned the Woods' quote. The book in which it appears was published in 1986 (almost 20 years ago), but he took it from his column in the *Gospel Advocate* which he had written some years earlier.

I spoke on the Gulf Coast Lectures in Portland a few weeks ago, on which occasion I visited with Jerry Moffitt. He brought the current MDR discussion up in our conversation (I was planning to broach the subject if he did not). He expressed his warm appreciation for various brethren, particularly for David and Lynn, and told me to pass this on to them (which I have done). He stated plainly (without my asking) that he did not see this issue as one that should sever fellowship. He said he knows that those on both sides of this issue believe that only fornication on the part of one's spouse can break the marriage bond, enabling one to remarry Scripturally, but that we just differ on our understanding of the timing aspect of the matter. He told me that he was not interested in debating anyone on it and did not think any good would come of such a debate. Further, he told me that he was telling those who were calling him about this flare up to "cool it." I was pleased to hear him say these things, but they left me wondering

why he said the things he did at Southwest in April 2004. Perhaps he did not realize that his remarks had the potential of pouring fuel on some coals that were already smoldering.

Eddie, even as you implored me to study this subject some more, I now implore you to do the same. If I understood you, you have withdrawn fellowship from David. To be consistent, you are going to have to withdraw from me—and from a much longer list of others than you seem to realize. I hope you will move very slowly in any such direction. I am well aware that counting and naming those who hold this or that view in no way determines Truth or error. I would never even consider trying to establish or oppose any doctrine based on personalities. That being said, however, one should surely exercise some sense of caution before writing off men who have long been well known for their Scriptural scholarship, soundness, and balance, and for their courage under fire and their personal maturity. I suspect that you have no idea how many of us there are from whom you will have to withdraw if you get into the “withdrawing business” over this issue.

Just so you will know that I am not bluffing, I will randomly name a few (including those you have already mentioned), perhaps some of whom you were unaware: David Brown, Lynn Parker, Michael Hatcher, Terry Hightower, Jim Boyd, David Watson, Don Tarbet, Curtis Cates, Keith Mosher, Bobby Liddell, Garland Elkins, Gary Summers, Kenneth Ratcliff, Cliff Newell, Paul Vaughn, Wayne Jackson, Jack Hendry, Jackie Stearsman, Tim Kidwell, Jason Rollo, Frank Carriger, Larry Powers, Kent Bailey, David Smith, Daniel Denham, Jim Nash, Michael Light, Jeff Sweeten, Denny Wilson, Dorsey Traw, Tom Bright, Ken Cohn, Robert R. Taylor, Wesley Simons, Eddy Craft, Jim Lewis, J.C. Watkins, Freddie Clayton, and Buddy Roth. There are others, but I think you will recognize all or most of these names. I pray that you, Jim Waldron, and others who believe our position is heretical will think twice about withdrawing your fellowship and thus creating another unnecessary cleavage in the precious body of Christ.

We have been friends many years, and I have done my best to prove the sincerity of my friendship. I defended you through all of the years over the 1989 Brown Trail mess. I defended you in all of the turmoil with Buster and FF.... You have likewise been a very good friend to me, not the least of which demonstrations were the generous and consistent financial contributions you sent for several years. I would very much like our friendship to continue. I hope and pray that you share this desire. If it cannot continue, I will not be the one who breaks it.

In Christian love,

Dub McClish

[Eddie Whitten responded to Dub McClish as follows by e-mail.]

June 7, 2005

Dear Dub:

I stand severely and thoroughly rebuked! I apologize for stirring you up to the point that you would use so much of your precious time in a response that seems to be tinged to some degree with a bit of anger. I hold no animosity toward you for upholding and defending what you believe to be Truth....

In rereading your letter several times, I have come to the conclusion that, generally, we agree on just about everything except the **timing** involving fornication associated with the divorce. I fear that you have completely misunderstood my understanding, as well as others perhaps, by stating that I evidently accept any marriage as being honored by God. Of course, I do not. I have always believed that a couple must be Scripturally eligible to be married before God honors that marriage. Your reference to Adam and Eve is by no means an argument against civil marriage ceremonies. In those early days, however long that might be, there had to be incest between brother and sister, or else God created other people of whom we have no record. Yet, at some point, incest became unScriptural just as marriage without some form of civil observance ceased to have God's approval. If this were not the case then any form of cohabitation agreement between a man and a woman would constitute marriage. Today, we call any sexual activity engaged in by two parties, in such a context, fornication.

Also, it is apparent that you have misconstrued the civil divorce thing as I understand it. I have never stated, nor believed, that God **honors** a civil divorce for any reason. This is the crux of the whole situation under discussion! God does not, repeat not, HONOR a divorce without fornication being the reason for the divorce. He does recognize the civil divorce which makes any subsequent sexual involvement adultery. I stand in full agreement with the view that in spite of the civil divorce a couple is still married in God's eyes (totally Scriptural term) and does NOT have God's approval for the divorce. Hence any further sexual contact by either party constitutes adultery. This is the point with which I disagreed with Monte Evan's lecture in which he stated that the couple are no longer married and refuted the terminology "in God's eyes." I was there and told him I disagreed with him on that point. I think his lecture was a little bit of an overreaction on that point.

You accused me of misquoting Jesus and by doing so "presume(d) to take such liberties." You have paraphrased Scriptures before, I am sure, and that is merely what I was doing, not quoting Jesus. If "puts away his wife" (Mat. 5:32; 19:9) does not mean a civil divorce,

what does it mean? I don't think that Jesus was saying anything other than that in the light of the Pharisee's question, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" How, and in what manner, can a man "put away" his wife if it is not, indeed, by civil divorce? And, this is where the timing becomes a factor. If the cause (Mat. 5:32; Mat. 19:9 [implied]) of the civil divorce is not fornication then it is an Unscriptural divorce NOT having God's approval thus making subsequent marriage unlawful (as per Herod Antipas and Herodias). If you and all the others you named, believe that the civil divorce does not enter in to the equation, it appears to me that you are reading something into the Scriptures that is not there. I have always believed that God joins an eligible couple in marriage (v. 6), therefore man cannot put asunder that marriage. I can also see that God ends a marriage on the basis of adultery if the "innocent" party so desires whether adultery is specifically stated in the divorce action or not. What I cannot agree with you on is your total disregard for the unScriptural, God disapproved, civil divorce that condemns subsequent sexual activity whether in the context of God disapproved civil marriage, or not. If my paraphrase of Jesus is not correct, as you believe it is not, then you would have to paraphrase Mat. 5:32 something like this: "Whoever **mentally** puts away his wife after a civil divorce on the basis of subsequent fornication makes her an adulteress."

Now, in regard to Jim Waldron. I have never met the man. I have heard of his tactics. I was called by him and asked to write the "waiting game" article. I have no idea why he asked me to do so other than perhaps he has read articles which I had written before, and I am sure that I have written many. He also called me a couple of times afterward and at least hinted that he would like to make a major issue out of this, to which I counseled him to not push it to that degree. I also know that he hounded Gary Grizzell almost to a point of frustration to do the same. Gary called me about it and I told him to caution Jim about making a divisive issue out of it. I knew that he left Dunlap under duress over the MDR issue, but I did not know that my article was the catalyst for that. Neither did I know he split the congregation over it. All he told me was that he had to leave there because the preacher there differed with him to the point of causing trouble. I have not heard from Jim since then. As an aside, someone told me, and I absolutely do not remember who, that given the circumstances to which I referred in the article, Robert Taylor said that it sounded like the waiting game to him. I will qualify that report by saying I don't know whether it is true or not. One thing I also need to clarify to you is that I never said that I regretted writing the article.

One other point then I will close. As to continuing to write the "Last Word" for CFTF after David, Lynn and I had disagreed on the subject, I did so because I truly did not know the disagreement was so widespread and controversial at that time. I read with concern the issue in

which Terry named all of you and refuted Jim Mettenbrink's previous article. That was only a short time before the Spring Lectures the next February. I confronted David in some way (I really do not remember how) about the situation and the ultimate fallout it might precipitate. It was then that David revealed to me that he and the elders had chosen to honor me with the book dedication. I told him that I appreciated that more than he could imagine, but under the circumstances, I would have to leave that decision up to them. He later informed me that they had decided to go ahead with the presentation. The next June it was to my profound surprise that the same thing happened at Bellview. I did not, repeat not, know then that Michael held the same view David did. By the way, David has been cold as ice toward me ever since. I never hear from him anymore. I can understand that if he has reference to my poor preaching, but I feel there is more to his coolness toward me than that.

I have changed my views on many matters over the many years I have been in the church. I am not so naive as to believe that I know it all and cannot be taught. I know a few men who, I believe, have reached the plateau that they believe no one can teach them anything. I do not believe you fall into that category at all. And, I was shocked that you interpreted my comments to imply that you had taken this view as a result of friendship or politics, or anything else having to do with maintaining favor. I am sure that I did not express myself plainly and wish to emphasize that I do not believe you to be anyone's puppet. I would not respect you at all if that is what I thought of you. However, I am deeply in debt to those who have taught me over the years the more perfect understanding of God's word. I believe that we can all be taught, and that teaching must come, not only from our own study, but as a result of the study of others. If this were not the case, then, as I told Stanley Lockhart one time: If we should not teach others concerning controversial subjects, all we have to do is give them a bible and tell them to study for themselves, and the [*sic*] we, as preachers, can go fishing. That is one of the clarion benefits of the lectureship books that the lectureships have produced; to glean from the knowledge of others.

One last thought: Should I be surprised that Mac is moving to PS? I am totally underwhelmed at Harry! If it was not evident that they were sympathetic to Mac's doctrine before, this should remove all doubt. I expect that there will be a few to drive to Denton from Brown Trail now.

Much love to you and Lavonne,

Eddie

[Dub McClish responded to Eddie Whitten by e-mail as follows.]

July 7, 2005

Mr. Eddie Whitten
1102 N. Paseo De Golf
Green Valley, AZ 85614

Dear Eddie:

Thanks for your prompt response. Please pardon mine for being rather tardy again. Besides various writing deadlines, we had Laurie (Andy's wife) and their two young ones (12, 8) with us for a week soon after your letter arrived. I began this response June 18 on a flight from DFW to Columbus, OH, for a Gospel meeting at Pomeroy, OH.... Various other things, including a visit from Hal (our older son) and family, have "conspired" to prevent my finishing my response before now.

My defense for writing at such length is the numerous items in your letter that I felt warranted addressing. Neither severity nor anger were in my heart as I wrote. If I failed in my intent to discuss this issue "frankly and openly, yet as a gentleman," I apologize. I did not write to rebuke, but merely to affirm strongly my convictions. Your letter would better qualify as a rebuke, although I sincerely accepted your condemnation of my convictions as "brotherly" and out of an "obviously sincere concern" for me. (I did not refer to your convictions as "disconcerting," "strange ideas about MDR," "new wrinkle," "erroneous position," "invention," "error," and "a matter of salvation involved." And, had I not already known your position, I would not have been "really taken aback" upon learning it, for truly, although we disagree, I do not hold our disagreement on this issue to be one of concern. Can we not test and discuss this (or any other issue) forthrightly as long-time friends without invective, pejoratives, and judgmental terminology, and without attribution of malevolent motive? This is certainly my desire and intent....

You are right in saying that our basic disagreement is a matter of timing, a fact I have known all along. This should be the end of the matter as far as I'm concerned. If I have "misconstrued the civil divorce thing" as you understand it, I did not do so intentionally. Maybe you can help me understand it. Let me, as briefly as possible, call attention to what I believe is a basic contradiction in your recent letter (and your position): "God does not, repeat not, **honor** a

divorce without fornication being the reason for the divorce. He does recognize the civil divorce which makes any subsequent sexual involvement adultery.”

To me this statement appears to be a semantics exercise by saying in one sentence that God does not “honor” a pre-fornication divorce, but then saying immediately that He “recognizes” such a divorce. In what sense does He “recognize” it without “honoring” it? How can one separate the actions of “honoring” and “recognizing” such a divorce? If God “recognizes” a pre-fornication civil “divorce,” in what sense is the couple still “married” and why would remarriage constitute adultery? If you say they are still married (per Mat. 19:6) in spite of the civil “divorce,” how can God be said either to “recognize” or to “honor” the “divorce” in any sense? Note: It is not, as you say, God’s recognition of “the civil divorce which makes any subsequent sexual involvement adultery.” Rather, sexual involvement with another besides one’s God-joined spouse is adultery with or without a civil divorce, because the couple is still married to each other before God. Here is where I need help with my understanding of just what you believe concerning “the civil divorce thing.”

According to Matthew 19:9, a “divorce” decree obtained before one’s mate has committed fornication is nothing more than a blank piece of paper as far as God is concerned, which He neither recognizes nor honors. Such a decree allows neither spouse to (1) be free from the original God-joined union (v. 6) nor to (2) be entitled to a second God-joined union (v. 9). The only sense in which God “recognizes” such civil divorce decrees is that he knows that people seek them and that the state grants them (i.e., He is omniscient), but they are powerless as far as He is concerned. To put it another way, to Him, such a “divorce,” though granted by the state, has not even occurred, thus leaving the couple still married to each other.

I could write (and promise “salvation” based on) a new version of Mark 16:16a as follows: “He that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved,” but it would be meaningless (i.e., in relation to altering God’s will in the matter), although God would be quite aware (i.e., would “recognize”) that I had written it. Just so, a judge can write (and grant “divorces” based on) a new version of Matthew 19:9a as follows: “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for incompatibility, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” However, this rewrite would be just as meaningless in relation to God’s will in the matter as the rewrite of Mark 16:16a. That many preach the rewrite of Mark 16:16a does not mean that those who are not baptized can be saved. Furthermore, that many judges issue “divorce” decrees based on the rewrite of Matthew 19:9a does not mean that such couples are no longer bound together by God. Such “divorces” have no standing whatsoever with God.

The significance of “let not man put asunder” (v. 6b) is that man not only does not have the right, but that he also does not have the ability to sunder the joining done by God. You are likely familiar with the sermon idea (you may have even preached it), “Let Not Man Put Asunder,” based on this passage. I first saw it in about 1960, and I preached it many times through the years. It starts by applying the clause to the immediate context of husband and wife, and then moves to such things as faith and works, Christ and the church, baptism and salvation, and such like. The unifying point of all such items is that if God has joined them together, it is impossible for men to sunder them from each other. Only God could do so. I believe this just as strongly about a husband and wife as I do about the other things I have listed, and a mere legal document labeled “divorce” will not do it. While God has not given us any exceptions regarding the other things he has bound together, he has given the fornication exception regarding a husband and wife. He will unjoin them on that ground while they both are living, but upon no other. It matters not how many judges grant how many “divorces” upon how many conditions other than the Lord’s one—such decrees do not effect the joining God has done in any way. If such a “divorce” is meaningless to God, how can that worthless piece of paper (i.e., a “no divorce” to God) render the subsequent fornication of a spouse invalid, thus preventing the innocent spouse from claiming the very ground upon which God will unjoin those He had once joined?

Couples “divorced” with no fornication involved (assuming they were joined together by God, Mat. 19:6) are still married before God (with which I understand you agree), even if they live separately for ten years or for the rest of their lives. The only right to marriage privileges or to a marriage relationship either of them has, minus the fornication factor, is reconciling to one another (note, not re-marrying, for they were never un-married to each other). They must remain unmarried as far as any other mate is concerned (1 Cor. 7:11).

I was glad to hear you say that you disagreed with Monte Evans in at least two respects and that you understand the phrase, “In God’s eyes” to connote a Scriptural concept. At least some of your persuasion (including Jim Waldron and my long-time friend, Jerry Moffitt) ridicule this expression and reject it as unscriptural, for what reason or reasons I cannot comprehend.

I could find no response to the hypothetical (but certainly not unrealistic) MDR situation I set forth in my previous letter, involving a prefornication legal divorce “Joe” obtained from “Jane.” Perhaps a few questions and their answers (some of which I asked, and you did not answer, in my first letter) will help accentuate and elucidate this issue. I would very much like your response. Here is the situation again:

Jane did nothing to bring about the divorce. As already noticed, she sought to **prevent** the divorce. She tried to be **reconciled** to Joe and would have forgiven him, but he refused. By marrying Mary, Joe committed fornication, the very ground upon which an innocent spouse may be Scripturally free from the original marriage bond and free to marry again (of course, fornication does not in **itself** dissolve a marriage, but it gives the offended party the **right** to dissolve it and remarry). Jane is an innocent victim, the very one to whom the Lord's statement gives the right to remarry. However, she cannot now obtain a civil divorce, for legally, Joe has already done that; the civil authorities no longer recognize Joe as still being her husband (although God still does). However, as we have already seen, the legal divorce Joe obtained is meaningless before God. The marriage is thus **Scripturally** ended, giving Jane the **Scriptural** right to remarry, if she chooses.

1. Does "Jane" (in the foregoing example) have a Scriptural (as well as legal, since a legal/civil "divorce" has already been granted) right to consider her marriage to Joe ended, and does she have the legal **and** Scriptural right to remarry someone who is Scripturally eligible to marry?
2. If you say "no" to question 1, please help me understand why.
3. If, as you have said, God does not "honor" Joe's legal/civil, pre-fornication divorce (in which case it is therefore Scripturally meaningless), what is the difference—Scripturally speaking—in (a) Joe's **obtaining** such a "divorce" and leaving Jane and (b) his simply **moving out and separating himself from** Jane **without** any "divorce" decree?
4. What if Joe, upon receiving the legal/civil pre-fornication "divorce," had **not** "married" Mary, but had simply **moved in** with her and they had engaged in fornication? Would Jane have the right to consider her marriage to Joe ended (legally **and** Scripturally) and to remarry some other eligible mate?
5. What if Joe had **not** obtained a legal/civil pre-fornication "divorce" from Jane (and was therefore unable legally to "marry" Mary), but had simply **moved in** with her, engaging in fornication with her? Would Jane have the right to divorce Joe (legally **and** Scripturally) and remarry some other eligible mate?
6. If you answer "yes" to question 5, but "no" to questions 1 and 4, please explain your reasons. Is it because: (a) Joe filed for and obtained the "divorce," thus preventing Jane from filing? (b) Joe's fornication took place **after** he obtained his meaningless (to God) "divorce" from Jane? (c) Joe's legal/civil pre-fornication "divorce" was "honored" by God after all and was **not** merely a meaningless piece of paper (in which case, civil law has superseded Divine law)? or (d) for some other reason or reasons (please specify)?

7. Since Joe's pre-fornication, not-"honored"-by-God "divorce" was a meaningless piece of paper (in God's eyes), what is the Scriptural and moral difference in the situations described between items 4 and 5 above?
8. If Joe got a pre-fornication divorce from Jane and never committed fornication till he died, would Jane then have the right to remarry when he died? If so, why?
9. If Jane's situation relative to remarriage can change after a pre-fornication divorce because of Joe's **subsequent** death, why cannot Jane's situation relative to remarriage change after a pre-fornication divorce because of Joe's **subsequent** fornication?
10. Do you believe that to say that Jane has a Scriptural right to remarry (per no. 1 above) is an example of playing "the waiting game"?
11. If Guy N. Woods were alive today, would you withdraw your fellowship from him because of his comments in *Questions and Answers*, Volume 2, pp. 45–46?
12. Do you consider yourself no longer in fellowship with me because of my convictions on this issue?

Thanks for the reassurance that you do not believe my convictions are either politically or fraternally motivated, on this or any other issue. I could not, however, help inferring that you may have so believed from some of the things you first wrote. Of course, I will continue to learn and sharpen my Biblical knowledge and understanding as long as I possess the faculties to do so, as should we all. I have learned much from many through the years, and I hope to continue to do so. Discussions such as the one in which we are now engaged is one way of doing so.

The matter that troubles me most at present is the fellowship factor and the possibility that good friends of many years, all equally dedicated to the Truth, will part company. We are in the midst of so many crucial spiritual battles in the church, and who knows what the future holds in this regard? So many have already fallen. We need to continue standing as one and fighting these battles together as so many of us have been doing for so many years. When all is said and done, this specific facet of the MDR issue is one that brethren must determine how to approach (1) on the basis of specific MDR situations and (2) on the local congregational level, using all of the prayers we can offer and the wisdom we can muster.

Just for the record, this issue will not become one that sunders fellowship, as far as I am concerned, unless brethren who oppose my view bind theirs upon all brethren and label those of us who dare disagree with them as "liberals" and "heretics," unworthy of their fellowship. I trust that you would not be so radical. Although I obviously believe my position is correct, I have

never bound it and have no intention of binding it upon others. Nor will I set others at nought who differ with me on it, just for disagreeing. You know that I have not made this issue a battleground (you didn't even know my position). I don't plan to even discuss it unless called upon to do so, as you have done. I think I have said enough in my two letters for you to know my convictions and their bases, so I see no need to respond further relating to our differences.

Remember:

1. I fully understand and believe that there is one, and only one, Scriptural ground for divorce and remarriage, as set forth in Matthew 19:9.
2. I do not believe in any sort of intentional or manipulative "waiting game" on this subject.

In brotherly love,

Dub

PS By snail mail, I am taking the liberty of sending you a copy of Terry Hightower's FSOP chapter on this subject.

[Eddie Whitten did not respond to Dub McClish's second letter.]

[NOTE: This exchange was published in the May 2006 issue of *Contending for the Faith*, David P. Brown, Editor.]