

Statement From Brother Dave Miller and My Response

Dub McClish

On September 23, 2005, brother Dave Miller issued the following statement in response to the accusations of numerous brethren that he has taught and practiced the unauthorized elder reevaluation/reaffirmation procedure and that he has advocated an erroneous position regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We produce his statement in full below, followed by my observations and responses:

For Honorable Brethren Who Sincerely Want to Know

The vast majority of those in our great brotherhood who encounter rumors and hearsay choose to believe the best about their brother, suspending judgment until verification is forthcoming. They sincerely want to believe and hope the best about their brothers and sisters in Christ (I Corinthians 13:7). *For the sake of these dear brethren*, and in the spirit of Proverbs 18:17 ("the first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him"), I wish to offer a brief word of explanation and clarification concerning the allegations and accusations that are circulating.

"Elder Reaffirmation"

- I do not believe in the "reaffirmation/reevaluation of elders" as my critics have defined the concept.
- I do not believe that elders should be temporarily appointed, and their "terms" only continued on the basis of an arbitrary vote of the membership.
- I do not believe that a congregation has the right to use any procedure that expels qualified men from the eldership.

What I **do** believe is that elders have the authority to solicit from the congregation the congregation's desires regarding who should serve them as elders.

The specific instance at Brown Trail **in 1990** entailed a process that was instigated and executed by the elders themselves. The elders appointed Johnny Ramsey, two instructors from the school of preaching, and me to do the "leg work," but it was **the elders themselves that initiated the process and implemented it** from beginning to end. The issue boils down to a single point, illustrated by two questions: (1) Does an elder (or preacher, deacon, Bible class teacher) have permission from God to request the members to give him their feedback regarding whether they think he is qualified to continue to serve and/or perform his job properly? (2) And does that elder then have the scriptural right to decide whether he will remove himself based on the response that he gets from the members?

The few passages that have anything to do with the selection and ongoing qualification of officers in the church (e.g., Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 5:17-20), imply that the congregation has the right to participate in the appointment (i.e., "evaluation") of their leaders. The process or method by which an individual is deemed to be biblically qualified is not spelled out in Scripture. It is therefore a matter of expediency that falls within the God-granted **authority of the elders**. Those who have turned this issue into their pet hobby are the very ones who are tampering with the authority of elders.

While I am not aware of any unscriptural actions having occurred, I was not in any way involved in a completely separate procedure implemented at Brown Trail **in 2002** by a different eldership that was then in place. I had already resigned and was in the process of moving to Alabama. It is astounding that an event that occurred **15 years ago**—an event that I have neither repeated nor promoted since—should cause such a stir!

MDR as it Relates to "Intent"

It is unnecessary for me to explain my views regarding what the Bible teaches on the overall subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. I have taught on this subject for many years and my views are a matter of public record, having been permanently documented in lectureship manuscripts, school of preaching classes, a tract I wrote on the subject, a section in *Piloting the Straits*, numerous sermons I have preached over the years, articles in brotherhood journals, and television programs recorded for "The Truth in Love." My views are the same views held by the faithful segment of our brotherhood: one man for one woman for life with fornication being the one and only exception by which the innocent party can put away his/her mate and remarry.

However, several years ago an incident occurred in the school of preaching where I served as director. One of the staff members was found to have gained entry into the U.S. several years earlier (before he became a Christian) at the behest of his cousin who had concocted a plan by which they would "marry" on paper in order to defraud the U.S. government to achieve his entrance into the U.S. As soon as the conspiratorial goal was achieved, they planned to put through the paperwork to end the "marriage." When the elders and I became aware of this situation—which had occurred years earlier—we confronted the brother, who acknowledged/confessed the incident and expressed a penitent attitude. The elders then assessed the situation and decided that he would be allowed to continue in his capacity with the school and church. The elders counseled him to rectify these past mistakes to the extent that he was able to do so. They also cautioned him regarding his marital status, but no official pronouncement was made concerning his future

eligibility for marriage in view of the fact that he was single and not entertaining any prospect of marriage. The entire affair was laid to rest to the satisfaction of the eldership. Five factors that the talebearers of the brotherhood consistently fail to include in their widespread reporting of this circumstance is (1) the woman who offered to accomplish his entry into the U.S. was **his cousin** (illegal in and of itself); (2) the two never did anything to indicate that they actually **intended** to be married or viewed themselves as such (i.e., they did not live together or enter into any relationship or arrangement that could even be remotely construed as marriage); (3) the woman had been married before and was **not eligible to remarry**; (4) the woman is **dead and has been deceased for many years** (cf. Romans 7:1-3); and (5) he remains **unmarried** to this day.

Totally separate and apart from this incident which occurred in the 1990s, I was asked by the elders to participate in a Wednesday evening Summer Series program in 2001 in which the preachers of the congregation formed a panel and fielded questions from members of the auditorium class. One question posed the hypothetical situation in which two people conspire to defraud the government in order for one of them to gain entry into the U.S. In a completely off-the-cuff response to the question. I pointed out that there must be mutual intention for a marriage to take place. I gave as an example (poor as it may have been) a situation in which a person is kidnapped and drugged only to wake up days later to find that he is married—with no recollection of having gotten married. He did not consent/intend to be married. [Another example would be Hollywood actors making a movie in which their characters get married. They speak the vows and say everything that would ordinarily be said at a real wedding. Yet no one thinks they actually get married—since their intention is lacking.] These incidents, in which I responded "off the top of my head" in an attempt to offer input on the submitted question. have been latched onto and blown all out of proportion to make it appear as if I've abandoned Bible teaching on MDR and am out counseling hundreds of people to remarry. They claim I advocate that a marriage is not a marriage if either party had "mental reservations" when they married! I categorically deny ever having said, implied, or believed such a thing. My spur-of-the-moment remarks do not contradict my continued belief that two eligible people who are married can divorce only on the grounds of fornication, with the result that the fornicator is not eligible to contract another marriage. Yet, this extremely rare, unusual, unique situation is being held up as a "false doctrine that threatens to undermine the very foundations of marriage"!

May God bless us all in our efforts to be faithful to Him, and to do His work without the distractions of unnecessary division.

—Dave Miller
Montgomery, AL
9/23/05

PS: In addition to the above misrepresentations, I have been astounded that in the last 3-4 years, additional FALSE rumors have circulated about me, including the following:

1. That I believe in instrumental music in worship
2. That I stole money from Brown Trail (a charge dispelled by an IRS audit)
3. That I had an affair with a woman
4. That I believe in the doctrine of annihilation of the soul
5. That I am dead

My Response to Brother Miller's Statement

I am glad to see that brother Miller has finally addressed, in print, the accusations many faithful brethren have made against him for a long time. I have read brother Miller's statement, and I have the following observations:

1. His condescending attitude is evident in the title of his statement. He suggests that those who dare question his doctrine or practice are "dishonorable" and "insincere," and that those who do not accept **all his explanatory statements** are "dishonorable," "insincere," and willfully ignorant. He obviously does not think well of those who dare question his doctrine or practice.
2. He based Brown Trail's implementation of the reevaluation/reaffirmation (hereafter r/r) procedure in 1990 on the claim that the elders themselves "initiated," "instigated," and "executed" the program. To argue that a practice is authorized merely because fallible elders decide to do it is very dangerous ground. A large number of unauthorized and erroneous practices, which elderships have "initiated," "instigated," and "executed" characterize many congregations nowadays. "Eldership authorization" and "Scripture authorization" may be and sometimes are vastly different. Liberals argue that women may lead prayers or preach in mixed adult assemblies and the Lord's supper may be observed on days other than the Lord's day **if the elders themselves "initiate" and "instigate" it**.
3. I do not know about other "critics," but I have not defined brother Miller's r/r doctrine for him in what I have written about him (1997 Bellview Lectures book, *Leadership*). I have simply quoted him and let him define what he believes and advocates concerning the practice. I believe he has attempted to erect a straw man here, of which he can easily dispose, of course. He needs to come face to face with what he has publicly taught and helped implement, rather than accusing others of inventing things about him.

4. I have never suggested (nor have I seen it suggested by others) that Dave Miller believes in the practice of "term limits" or stated terms for elders, at the end of which they must submit to the r/r procedure. This is another straw man.
5. If he does not believe "that a congregation has the right to use any procedure that expels qualified men from the eldership," why did he advocate and help implement a procedure that could do just that? In the "Rationale" the Brown Trail r/r committee (of which brother Miller was a part) issued to help "sell" the congregation on the r/r program it implemented in 1990, we read the following:

Shepherds cannot lead where sheep will not follow. Even if a man is technically qualified to be an elder, if the membership where he attends does not perceive him as a leader whom they respect and trust, he cannot shepherd effectively.

Brother Miller said the same thing in his sermon on April 8, 1990, from the Brown Trail pulpit. The admission that an elder who is qualified may be removed simply because a sufficient number of members choose not to follow him or do not "perceive him as a leader" is a glaring and exceedingly dangerous addition to sacred Scripture. To "perceive" one as a leader on its very surface is a subjective evaluation. This, in effect, adds another qualification to those Paul specified in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

6. Brother Miller cites Acts 6:3 as if it favors his r/r case. All this passage does is furnish the principle that the whole congregation is to be involved in the selection of elders and/or deacons. One searches it in vain to find some intricate reevaluation process of men who were already selected, appointed, and serving. Again, Acts 6:3 does not help his case.
7. To use 1 Timothy 5:17–20 as authority for the r/r practice is to engage in eisegesis rather than exegesis. To say that a man should be removed because "25% of the congregation doesn't want to follow him," "doesn't like him," or "doesn't perceive him as a leader" is not in this passage or any other. 1 Timothy 5:17–20 does not help his case. Obviously, brother Miller would have used additional passages to justify the r/r process if he could have found them.
8. To accuse those who dare question brother Miller's advocacy of r/r as thereby pursuing a "pet hobby" is purely pejorative terminology, intended to bias uninformed readers against those who sincerely question his doctrine and/or practice. The hurling of such terminology has for years been a favorite ploy of liberals, and it is certainly unworthy of the author of the fine book, *Piloting the Strait*.
9. We who deny the existence of Scriptural authority for the r/r process are not the ones who are "tampering with the authority of elders," as he charges. Rather, those (whether or not they are elders at the time) who form committees (such as brother Miller was a part of) are those who tamper with the authority of elders **by becoming de facto "elderships" while the r/r procedure runs its course**. The existing elderships and their respective congregations in such cases **must subject themselves** to such committees for the plan to function.
10. If brother Miller was not involved in the 2002 r/r procedure at Brown Trail, why did he help Maxie Boren (Brown Trail preacher at the time) defend the practice to brother Dub Mowery (nativeheritage@peoplepc.com), who journeyed all the way from Drumright, OK (near

Tulsa, where he preached at the time) to Brown Trail (about 300 miles one way) to express his objections to and concerns over their 2002 version of r/r?

11. Brother Miller seeks to place the Brown Trail practice of r/r in the realm of "expediency." This appeal to "expediency," however, overlooks an elementary principle of Biblical hermeneutics: Scriptural **authorization** must precede expediency. No matter can be expedient unless it is first **authorized**, and the Scriptural authorization for this practice has not been and cannot be produced.
12. Why is brother Miller "astounded" that an event that occurred 15 years ago (1990) could cause such a "stir"? Surely, he is aware that the mere passage of time does not transform sin into righteousness or error into Truth. Repentance, rather than the passing of time, is necessary for correction and forgiveness (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38, et al.). My guess is that he has likely preached this repentance/forgiveness principle to others through the years.
13. Brother Miller denies he has "preached or promoted" this practice since 1990 (which sounds like a clear admission that he "preached" and "promoted" it then). Our brother David Watson has observed his influence encouraging this practice in a congregation near him in recent years, contrary to his disclaimer. As noted in item 10 above, he defended the 2002 implementation of the practice at Brown Trail to brother Dub Mowery.
14. Brother Miller is wrong in thinking that it is unnecessary to explain his views "regarding what the Bible teaches on the overall subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage." His justification of an extremely dangerous and flawed (not to mention unscriptural) view of "intent" regarding marriage has made it **absolutely essential** for him to explain his views on this most significant subject.
15. The Brown Trail staff member who married his cousin was brother Everett Chambers, who brother Miller had not only admitted as a student in Brown Trail Preacher Training School (which brother Miller directed at the time), but who, soon after graduation, he appointed as his Assistant Director of the school. If brother Chambers and his cousin "never did anything to indicate that they actually intended to be married or viewed themselves as such (i.e., they did not live together or enter into any relationship or arrangement that could even be remotely construed as marriage)," how did their actions help him get into and stay in the U.S.? Did they not have to go through some sort of wedding ceremony, and did they not have to affix their signatures to an application for a marriage license and then do the same on a marriage certificate? Were not these actions on the part of both actions which indicate "that they actually intended to be married," even though their purpose in doing so was a conspiracy to "defraud the U.S. government" (as brother Miller aptly described their purpose)? Was not the full intent of both of them to become legally married so as to enable him to enter and remain in the U.S.? Had they not indicated to the authorities (by going through required marriage procedures) that they **desired** to be married, they could not have accomplished their purpose. **They** may not have viewed themselves as married, **but the authorities did**, else they would not have had to "put through the paperwork to end the 'marriage'" (generally called "divorce," I believe, though brother Miller apparently could not bring himself to use this term relating to brother Chambers' fraudulent and unscriptural conduct). I have the same difficulty justifying this *I-didn't-intend-to doctrine* that I do

justifying the Roman Catholic doctrine of “mental reservation.” In fact, I will appreciate it if someone can explain the difference.

16. Is brother Miller implying in the statement above that a man and a woman are not married at the time they are pronounced husband and wife, but that they must “live together” before they become married? If, after being pronounced “husband and wife” in the eyes of both civil and Divine law, Bob and Sally, on the way from the wedding site to the place of their initial act of intimacy, Bob dies of a heart attack, were they never married?
17. What is the relevance of the woman’s being ineligible to marry brother Chambers because they were cousins? Is he implying that had she not been his cousin, their defrauding the immigration authorities would have been acceptable?
18. That the woman had been married before and was not eligible to remarry does not alter the fact of their conspiratorial intent. Is brother Miller attempting to argue that had she been eligible to marry, the deception would have been justified? If this is not his point, I missed it.
19. That brother Chambers was not a Christian at the time he and his cousin “accidentally” married is hardly relevant, unless one wishes to argue (as many false teachers do) that one’s marriage relationships before one becomes a Christian do not “count,” and that baptism takes care of such unscriptural unions.
20. Whether or not brother Chambers “remains unmarried to this day” is not the issue and really is beside the point of the issue. The issue is, does brother Miller believe/teach that brother Chambers **has a Scriptural right to remarry**?
21. So far as I know, neither brother Chambers nor his cousin whom he married was kidnapped or drugged and therefore pronounced “husband and wife” against their wills or while in a drugged stupor. They were quite conscious of what they were doing, **fully intending** deceptively (yet nonetheless actually) to marry each other. Nor were they actors in a movie, but they deceptively “acted out” a live drama, with **full intent** to satisfy civil marriage laws to deceive the U.S. Government.
22. I have never suggested or heard anyone suggest that brother Miller has so “abandoned Bible teaching on MDR” that he is “out counseling hundreds of people to remarry.” If anyone is doing so, he should stop. Also, if anyone is doing so, let brother Miller produce the evidence of such or stop his accusation. His statement smacks of hyperbole and broad generalization.
23. It is good to see brother Miller’s forthright declaration of his position on who is eligible to marry, divorce, and remarry. However, he then diminishes the impact of that position statement with a significant exception (“However, several years ago the following...”), describing the behavior of Everett Chambers. After describing it, he then concludes: “Yet, this extremely rare, unusual, unique situation is being held up as a ‘false doctrine that threatens to undermine the very foundations of marriage!’” It matters not how “extremely rare, unusual, unique” the situation with brother Chambers may have been and may still be. If one (including brother Miller) justifies and excuses this practice in one person, then he must logically and consistently do so for all persons. If (a) brother Chambers did what brother Miller says he did (legally married his cousin), and (b) if he did it for the reason brother Miller says he did it (to defraud the U.S. Government, lying in order to circumvent U.S.

immigration laws), and (c) if, as brother Miller believes, brother Chambers and his cousin were not really married because of their lack of "intent," then (d) "the very foundations of marriage" are indeed thereby threatened.

24. Brother Miller refers to those who have dared challenge his strange MDR position relative to brother Chambers as "talebearers of the brotherhood." Were liberals, whose errors he exposed so well in *Piloting the Strait*, accurate in characterizing him as a "talebearer of the brotherhood"? I doubt that he would think so. Neither do I believe that he is accurate or fair in thus characterizing those who are not content to let his errors pass. He would have done better had he simply admitted his errors and repented of them rather than hurling pejorative terms at those who sincerely desire his repentance.
25. Brother Miller's statement will doubtless be more than sufficient for those who have defended him through the years and who so desperately now believe they must defend him for the sake of Apologetics Press, the institution he directs. They will now begin saying that he has "cleared up" and "corrected" all those accusations. However, for my part, I see no substantive answers to any of the nagging doctrinal questions he has created. I find his statement to be a very weak and self-serving one. Some may even suggest that I will not be satisfied unless "he crawls over shattered glass" and "bathes my feet in tears," but they will be as wrong as wrong can be. While I require no such thing, I do wish he had forthrightly repented of (instead of denying) his errors. Until he does, a dark cloud will be hanging over the good and needed work of Apologetics Press, preventing many, many brethren from supporting it.

[Note: I wrote this "Response" on October 10, 2005, and it was published in the October 2005 edition of *Defender*, edited by Michael Hatcher, and published by Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, Florida.]

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