
RESPONSE TO MALCOMB KNIFFEN

By George Battey
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On Nov 17, 2013, Brother Malcomb Kniffen preached a sermon at the 12th Street Church of Christ in Moore, OK on the subject of divorce and remarriage. Brother Malcomb and the 12th Street church both believe the "no-exception" doctrine – that there is absolutely no-exception for ever divorcing and remarrying – NO-CAUSE WHATSOEVER.

Jesus said this (I'm reading from the NKJV):

Matthew 5:31-32

31 "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason **except sexual immorality** causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Again:

Matthew 19:9

9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

Clearly Jesus taught there is a cause for a Christian to divorce and remarry – the cause of sexual immorality (or "fornication" as the KJV says).

Brother Malcomb teaches these two passages in Matthew's gospel are merely explaining the Law of Moses and he teaches this exception for divorce was "nailed to the cross" when Jesus died. This leaves the Christian with no-exception for divorce and remarriage.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REVIEW

The purpose of this review is to examine the arguments set forth by Brother Malcomb and see if they are true.

Acts 17:11

11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and **searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.**

This is what we will do in this review. We will "search the scriptures" to see if what Brother Malcomb taught was the truth.

Brother H. E. Robertson, a no-exception preacher, wrote a booklet entitled, "*It Is Written Of Marriage, Divorce And Remarriage.*" On p. 1 of that booklet, Brother Robertson writes, "*Truth has nothing to lose in an earnest, honest investigation.*" This is true. If, then, the no-exception position is true, there is nothing to fear from this investigation and review which I am about to give.

THINGS I APPRECIATE ABOUT MALCOM KNIFFEN

Let me begin by saying I do not want this review to be interpreted as if I hate or despise Brother Malcomb Kniffen.

Sincerity

I believe he is a very sincere man – but he is a very wrong man.

(It is possible to be both sincere and wrong at the same time and that describes brother Malcomb.)

He is sincere because he practices what he preaches. Listen to what he said:

I have the exception. My wife left me. She went down to the court ... I lived in Florida right north of Pensacola. She went to the Florida law, filed divorce on me, and in Florida when they do that you've got thirty days to leave the premises. So I left twenty-nine days early. I packed my U-Haul and I left out. The day I left, her boy friend moved in. I have the exception. But I have remained unmarried unto this day.

(Recording clip #M52 - Kniffen has the exception)

Brother Malcomb obviously practices what he preaches.

I know many families who started out believing just like Brother Malcomb. They believed in no-exception for divorce. They caused problems in congregations over the divorce question. But things change when one of their own children get divorced. Suddenly they "see the light" and decide there are all kinds of exceptions. Now, these families are still causing problems in the church. Only now the problem is that these families advocate divorce for every cause!

I cannot help but appreciate Brother Malcomb's sincerity for practicing what he preaches.

Usage of scripture.

I also want to commend Brother Malcomb for using scripture. There are many preachers today who preach without ever using scripture to support what they teach, but Brother Malcomb is not like this. He uses scripture. I believe he uses many scriptures in the wrong way, and I'm going to point this out in just a moment, but at least he recognizes the need for scripture.

A good speaker.

Brother Malcomb is also a very good speaker. I had lost a lot of sleep and was rushed trying to drive over to OKC in order to hear him speak on divorce and remarriage. I was very tired, but Brother Malcomb kept me awake. I arrived a little bit late, but was still able to listen to him preach for an hour and twenty minutes. I did not get the least bit sleepy and it seemed like only a few minutes by the time he finished speaking. He is a very good speaker.

I AM SINCERE TOO

Before I get into my analysis of Brother Malcomb's sermon, let me just say that I too am sincere in what I believe – God knows my heart.

My own marriage.

I do not believe in an exception because I am personally divorced. In May, 2013 I celebrated 32 years of marriage to my one and only wife. I am thankful the Good Lord has blessed me with my wonderful wife.

Together my wife and I have four children. Three of my children are married. None of my children are divorced. I do not believe in the exception because I'm trying to justify one of my children.

My own parents.

I am from a broken home. In 1975, my mother left my father for another man. The man she chose to have an affair with was the preacher at church. I opposed my own mother's marriage until the day she died.

My father went on to marry again after my mother left him. By the time my father died, he had been through four marriages and was living out-of-wedlock with his last girlfriend. I opposed his unscriptural divorces until the day he died.

As a result of my parents divorcing one another and, because I opposed what they had done, I finished growing up in a foster home. I do not believe in divorce and remarriage for fornication to excuse or justify a family member.

Loss of financial support.

In 1984 a congregation cut off half my financial support because I baptized a woman who had divorced her unfaithful husband and remarried another man. I'm telling you this story only to demonstrate I do not hold my position because of a love for money or a love for family ties. I have no ulterior motives. I hold my position because I believe it to be the truth.

Nor do I have any hatred for Brother Malcomb Kniffen. I respect him, but I respectfully disagree with him.

THE "SAFE WAY"

In his sermon Brother Malcomb suggested a "safe way" that would solve the entire discussion.

Do ya'll remember Brother James Stewart ... James R. Stewart? You know a good man – lived in Waco where I live. My uncle always worked on his appliances. You know, he was a refrigeration man – air conditioner man. He was at Brother Stewart's house one day and Brother Stewart said, "Ohhhh Kenneth," said uh, "I don't know if you've heard about my daughter or not." He said, "No I haven't what's the deal?" And he said, "Well," he said, "You know," uh ... he said uh, "You know her marriage is busted up ... something about the man ran off and did this, that or whatever you know." Said, "It's really sad." He said, "But I told her," he said, "Look honey, you've got the exception, but don't you DARE use it!" He said, "You stay unmarried. You stay here with me. You can stay here at my house ..." so forth and so on. And my uncle said, "Well Brother Stewart, that'll fix it right there. That'll fix it, if everybody would just say, 'YES!'" Don't take the chance. Don't tread out and skate on thin ice. Just do what Paul said, "Remain unmarried or be reconciled."

(Recording clip #M51 - James R. Stewart - "be safe")

This made an impression on the audience and it sounds like the "safe" thing to advise people. But there's just one problem with this advice: **The Bible doesn't teach it.**

Q: What does the Bible teach?

First: The Bible teaches that those who have the right to be married should *"marry rather than burn with passion"* (1 Cor 7:9).

Second: Those who forbid marriage to people who have the right to marriage are teaching a "*doctrine of demons*."

Listen to the scripture:

1 Timothy 4:1-3

1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,
2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,
3 **forbidding to marry**, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

To forbid marriage to people who have the right to marry is a "doctrine of demons" whether the Catholic Church teaches it or whether one of our own preachers teaches it.

We cannot tell every divorced person, "*Just be safe and don't ever remarry*." If the Lord gave innocent spouses the right to divorce cheating spouses, we have no right to tell these innocent spouses, "*Just be safe and don't ever remarry*."

So that's what this review is about.

Listen carefully as we examine what Brother Malcomb Kniffen taught.

DID JESUS TEACH THE GOSPEL OPENLY?

First, I want you to listen carefully to a very important statement which Brother Malcomb made. He said Jesus taught the "gospel of the kingdom" privately to His disciples but not openly to the multitudes. Listen carefully to what he said:

I also see quite a difference in the first four gospel accounts in what Jesus told the multitudes and what Jesus told privately to His disciples. Have you ever noticed that?

(M7 - Jesus taught gospel privately.)

So, according to this, Jesus taught Mosaic Law openly to the multitudes, but in private to His disciples, Jesus taught the new laws of the gospel which would begin after He was crucified and resurrected.

But let's see if Brother Malcomb is correct.

Q#1: Did Jesus ever teach the gospel openly to the multitudes?

Matthew 4:23

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, ...

Brother Malcomb is simply wrong. Jesus did teach the gospel publicly. Listen again:

Matthew 9:35

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, ...

So Brother Malcomb is simply wrong. Jesus did teach the gospel openly to the multitudes.

Q#2: Did Jesus teach the gospel privately only to His disciples?

This is what Brother Malcomb says, but what does the Bible say?

John 18:19-20

19 The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

20 Jesus answered him, "**I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing.**"

Brother Malcomb is simply wrong again.

THE "TEMPTATION" OF THE PHARISEES

We come next to Mt 19. To set the stage for his doctrine, Brother Malcomb begins with an assumption that the Pharisees were waiting to catch Jesus teaching contrary to Mosaic Law. Here's what Brother Malcomb said:

And then look at this right here. This shows you there was no good intended here in what they did. They came tempting Him. It was their life's mission to get Him crucified. ... They were like an interrogating lawyer and they just continually fired questions and fired statements to Him hoping that at least one time He would mess up and say something He shouldn't say. And then they could say, "Ah Hah! Ah Hah!" And the number one thing that they would have liked to get Jesus to do was contradict the law.

(M16 - Pharisees tempting Jesus #2)

Brother Malcomb assumes the trap for Jesus was to watch Him and see if Jesus would say something different than what Mosaic Law said.

But I'm questioning that assumption. Is that the trap being laid by the Pharisees?

Since Brother Malcomb is assuming things, allow me to suggest an alternative thought. Where was Jesus when this event took place?

Matthew 19:1

1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to **the region of Judea beyond the Jordan**.

According to this, Jesus is in "*the region of Judea beyond the Jordan*." Does this not ring a bell in your thinking? Haven't we heard this before somewhere? Yes.

John 1:28

28 These things were done in **Bethabara beyond the Jordan**, where John was baptizing.

The "*region of Judea beyond the Jordan*" was the region where John the Baptist was baptizing people. This region where John was baptizing is now where Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees who are asking about divorce and remarriage. Does that not seem odd to you?

What happened to John the Baptist over there "beyond the Jordan"? Listen:

Matthew 14:1-5

- 1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus
- 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."
- 3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.
- 4 Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."
- 5 And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

You see, Herod was rebuked by John for being in an unscriptural marriage.

Leviticus 18:16

16 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness.

Herod had married his brother Philip's wife and the law said he could not do that. John the Baptist rebuked Herod in front of everyone for this and Herod eventually had John killed.

Now Jesus is in the same region where John rebuked Herod. These Pharisees were probably hoping they could get Jesus on the subject of condemning Herod's marriage – just like John condemned it. If they could successfully get Jesus to condemn Herod, Herod might arrest Jesus and kill Jesus just like he arrested John and killed John.

If this is the true motivation of the Pharisees, then Brother Malcomb has no point at all to make. Those Pharisees could care less if Jesus taught gospel law contrary to Mosaic Law. Their hopes were to get Jesus entangled with King Herod.

So, from the very beginning, Brother Malcomb makes a critical assumption which is vital to his position – an assumption which he cannot prove.

JUST CAUSE TO KILL JESUS?

Let's move on to the next point.

Brother Malcomb taught that if Jesus taught differently from Moses' Law on divorce and remarriage, the Pharisees would have had just cause to kill Jesus! I can hardly believe Brother Malcomb taught this, but he did. Listen to him:

If they could have got Him to say something that they KNEW was not in the law, you know good and well they'd of jumped up and down to high cotton and said, "Whoa! we know better than that cause here's what the law says." So they were trying to ensnare Him and see if they could get Him to say something of that nature.

(M16 – Pharisees tempting Jesus to contradict the law)

Think about this carefully. According to Brother Malcomb Kniffen, if Jesus taught contrary to the Law of Moses on divorce and remarriage, then the Pharisees would have been justified in killing Jesus.

Q#1: Did Jesus teach the gospel law of divorce privately to His disciples?

Brother Malcomb says, "Yes ... He did!"

Q#2: Does this mean Jesus deserved to die because He taught privately something that was contrary to Mosaic Law?

Ouch! This hurts Brother Malcomb's position doesn't it!

To Brother Malcomb, and to everyone who believes the no-exception doctrine, I say this: The crucifixion of Jesus was unjustified whether Jesus taught gospel law publicly or privately!

My friend, can you see the danger of a doctrine which ends up teaching that the death of Jesus was justifiable? Yet this is the no-exception doctrine. This is why I'm opposed to it.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Now let's discuss Brother Malcomb's remarks about the Sermon on the Mount.

Brother Malcomb taught the Sermon on the Mount is merely Mosaic Law being clarified. Supposedly the entire sermon is nothing more than Jesus explaining the true and proper meaning of Mosaic Law. Listen to this important statement:

And he said, "Not a jot," that's in Mt 5:17. "Not a jot, not a tittle of the law would be destroyed till ALL is fulfilled. And He even went one step further. Jesus said, "If you teach anything different from that, you're the least in the kingdom of heaven." He told people, "You have to teach what is in the law – EVERY JOT and EVERY TITTLE."

(M13 – "Not a jot or a tittle")

Did you hear that? Brother Malcomb just said that, according to Mt 5:19, if anyone teaches differently on just one jot or one tittle of Mosaic Law, that person is the "least in the kingdom of heaven."

Q#1: Brother Malcomb, did Jesus teach differently in private to His disciples?

Ouch! Yes He did. Brother Malcomb himself taught that Jesus, in the house, privately taught the gospel law about divorce and this new law was different than Mosaic Law.

Q#2: Since Jesus taught privately to His disciples a new divorce law contrary to Mosaic Law, is Jesus the "least in the kingdom of heaven"?

My friend, this point alone should concern you when someone teaches the no-exception doctrine. The no-exception doctrine taught by Brother Malcomb Kniffen ends up making Jesus the "least in the kingdom of heaven" because Jesus taught privately, to His disciples, a divorce law which Moses did not teach.

The Law of Moses itself predicted the preaching of a new law:

Deuteronomy 18:18-19

18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and **He shall speak to them all that I command Him.**

19 And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.

This is a prophecy that a new law would come from the Messiah. Again:

Isalah 52:15

15 So shall He sprinkle many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths at Him;
For **what had not been told them they shall see,**
And **what they had not heard they shall consider.**

Since the law and the prophets both predicted the Messiah would come and teach a new law, it was no violation of Mosaic Law for Jesus to publicly teach new, gospel law. This was to be expected.

More passages could be given to prove this point, but this is enough for now.

THE PRESENT TENSE "IS"

We move on now to another significant blunder in the no-exception doctrine.

Brother Malcomb gave a grammar lesson on the present tense of the verb "is." Listen to him:

Now look at this question: Is ... it ... lawful?
(M16 - IS present tense #1)

So Brother Malcomb is going to make a big argument on the present tense of the verb "is."
Listen to this illustration:

If I said, "Is it snowing?" You'd look out the window and say, "No; it's hot and sunny." Then you would think I was a crazy lunatic if I said, "No, I meant February." You'd say, "Well why didn't you say that? Why didn't you say, 'WILL IT BE snowing in February?' Why didn't you ask me a future tense question?"
(M16 - IS present tense #2)

Listen again:

Folks, when you're asking a present tense question, about a law, and then you throw a man's name in there, it probably has an awful lot to do with that question.
(M17 - present tense emphasized)

Are you getting the point? Do you see what Brother Malcomb is saying? He's trying to stress that the Jews were asking if it was lawful under Moses' Law to divorce for every cause. They were asking a "present tense" question about Mosaic Law.

- Since the Pharisees asked, "Is it lawful?" (present tense), Jesus must give an answer regarding Mosaic Law only – supposedly.

- Since they did not ask, "Will it be lawful," (future tense), Jesus cannot give an answer referring to how things will be in the future under gospel law – supposedly.

Okay. We have the situation clearly before us now. Supposedly, since the Jews asked about Mosaic Law, Jesus is obligated to answer only in regards to Mosaic Law; He cannot, supposedly, say anything about a future law – the gospel law of divorce.

Brother Malcomb is making up the rules about how Jesus can and cannot answer the question about divorce.

Q#1: What was Jesus' response? Did He follow the rules Brother Malcomb invented?

Watch closely:

Matthew 19:4-6

4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'
 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?
 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Jesus did not answer according to the rules invented by Malcomb Kniffen. Jesus began by referring backward to Patriarchal Law.

According to Brother Malcomb, Jesus could not look forward into the future to the gospel law and give an answer about divorce, because the Pharisees were not asking about the future. Instead, they wanted to know about the present tense Mosaic Law. So how does Jesus answer? He begins by looking backward into the past. He goes backward and begins with Patriarchal Law. In fact, Brother Malcomb agrees: **Jesus looked backward, into the past, in responding to a present tense question about Mosaic Law.** Listen to him:

Alright, verse 6 then. "Wherefore they are no more twain but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder." Again does that answer, "Can we divorce for every cause?" Well, again, it's even stronger than verse 5. No, "Whatever man joins ... whatever God joins, let not man put asunder." Actually, that sounds like you can't join at all. And you know why it sounds that way? Because that is God's original law.
(M17 – v6 is God's original law)

Q#2: If Jesus can look backward to the past in regard to a present tense question, why can't Jesus look forward into the future and talk about the gospel law?

Actually, Mt 19 shows a contrast between all three major dispensations of Bible history.

- **Patriarchal Law** (the past) – is discussed in vv4-6.
- **Mosaic Law** (the present) – is discussed in v8.
- **Gospel Law** (the future) – is discussed in v9.

Brother Malcomb took a very long time to explain why Jesus could not refer to the future, but he never explained why Jesus could refer to the past.

The truth of the matter is: Brother Malcomb is inventing rules about how Jesus can answer questions and how He cannot answer questions. Thankfully, Jesus is not bound by the rules Brother Malcomb invented.

EPHESIANS 5 – THE CLINCHER?

Let's move on.

Brother Malcomb stated that, in order to convince him there is an exception for divorce in the gospel age, someone would have to convince him from Ephesians 5. Listen to him:

It's not Mt 19 and 9 that has me all confused and has me thinking, "Oh I can't accept the doctrine of divorce for various reasons or whatever." That's not really what's got me hung up. If you want to convince me, then I'll just let the cat out of the bag here, if you want to convince me, that in this day and time, I can divorce and remarry, while my wife is still alive, you've got to convince me from Ephesians chapter 5.

(M25 – Eph 5 must convince Kniffen)

Listen to Brother Malcom's reasoning:

Since Christ and the church are parallel, here's what you've got to do – to change my old hard head – all you've got to do is just show me where there is an exception with Christ and the church. That'll work; that's legit.

(M26 – no-exception between Christ and church)

In other words, if there were an exception for a Christian to divorce cheating spouse and marry another person, then there must be an exception for Jesus to divorce a cheating church and marry another. This is Brother Malcomb's reasoning.

Now listen to one more point:

What's our alternative if we DO leave Christ? Exactly the same as Paul said to do, "Marry ... re ... remain unmarried or be reconciled." We've only got one bride ... one bridegroom. And He only has one bride.

(M27 - remain unmarried - only one bridegroom)

I'm not sure Brother Malcomb thought this through very carefully. He's trying to parallel Christ and the church even to the point of divorce and remarriage. His reasoning is this:

- If the church can divorce Christ and marry someone else, then a Christian may divorce his/her spouse and marry someone else.
- But if the church cannot divorce Christ and marry someone else, neither may a Christian divorce his/her spouse and marry someone else.

Since Brother Malcomb is making this parallel, let's take this to its logical conclusion. Brother Malcomb believes 1 Cor 7 is gospel law. Listen to what this passage says:

1 Corinthians 7:11

11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

Q: If a wife may depart from her husband and remain departed, may a Christian depart from Christ and remain departed? Is this permissible?

Brother Malcomb said YES. Listen again to what he said:

What's our alternative if we DO leave Christ? Exactly the same as Paul said to do, "Marry ... re ... remain unmarried or be reconciled." We've only got one bride ... one bridegroom. And He only has one bride.

(M27 - remain unmarried - only one bridegroom)

Is he serious? Is he so determined to have this no-exception doctrine that unless one can change his mind on Eph 5, he will refuse to be moved?

I'm only applying the divorce laws to Eph 5 because Brother Malcomb is the one who made the argument.

You see, it's dangerous to take an illustration or parable and begin to stretch that parable or illustration further than it was intended. The apostle Paul did not intend to teach that a church can divorce Christ and remain unmarried from Him and still be found acceptable. Brother Malcomb Kniffen teaches this, but the apostle Paul did not teach this.

Listen again:

If you do depart ... I've never preached against separation. I do not believe that you have to chase your husband or chase your wife around and get a lasso rope and dog-tie 'em you know, like you do a calf and say, "You are gonna live with me whether you like it or not!"
(M53 - don't have to go back to spouse)

This is truly amazing when you really stop and think about it.

Since Brother Malcomb does not believe a spouse "has to go back" to their original partner, this would mean a church can divorce Christ and that church does not "have to" go back to Christ in order be saved.

Just remember – this is Brother Malcomb's illustration, not mine.

COMMON OBJECTION #1

Now we move on to "common objections." Brother Malcomb is going to address common questions which he hears all the time and he's going to give an answer to these common objections.

Common Objection #1: "Jesus taught an exception, but you don't believe it."

This is the most common objection Brother Malcomb said.

His response is this: Jesus taught many things which we don't believe today – things like keeping the Sabbath Day, paying tithes to the temple, showing yourself to the priest and offering animal sacrifices. Therefore, Brother Malcomb's conclusion is: Since Jesus said some things which do not apply today, the exception for divorce does not apply today.

But Brother Malcomb is "begging the question." In other words, Brother Malcomb is assuming the conclusion without proving the conclusion.

- Yes, it is true that Jesus taught some things which do not apply in the gospel age.
- But, it is also true that He taught many things that do apply in the gospel age.
- Brother Malcomb must prove that the teachings of Jesus relative to divorce do not apply in the gospel age.
- This must be proven – not assumed.

As a matter of fact, the apostle Paul explicitly said that what Jesus taught regarding divorce applied to the gospel age.

1 Corinthians 7:10

10 Now to the married I command, **yet not I but the Lord**: A wife is not to depart from her husband.

Here we are explicitly told that the teachings of the Lord, when He was on the earth, regarding divorce apply to members of the church.

It is true the exception is not mentioned in this passage. But if an exception does exist, it is not necessary to mention that exception every time the rule is discussed.

Brother Malcomb ends up making the same mistake which the Baptists make with Jn 3:16. What do the Baptists do?

- The Baptist preacher reads Jn 3:16.
- He notices Jn 3:16 says nothing about baptism.
- The Baptist preacher then concludes: Since Jn 3:16 didn't mention baptism, baptism is therefore not necessary for salvation.

But what do we say in response? We point out that Jn 3:16 is not the final word on the subject. We point out that all passages pertaining to the subject must first be consulted before drawing a proper conclusion.

The same thing applies to 1 Cor 7.

- Brother Malcomb reads 1 Cor 7:10-11.
- He notices 1 Cor 7 says nothing about an exception.
- Brother Malcomb then concludes: Since 1 Cor 7 didn't mention the exception, the exception is therefore not for Christians.

In response, what should we say to Brother Malcomb? We must point out that 1 Cor 7:10-11 is not the final word on the subject. We must point out that all passages pertaining to the subject must first be consulted before drawing a proper conclusion. We must consult what Jesus taught in Mt 5:32 and 19:9.

COMMON OBJECTION #2

Let's move on to the next "common objection."

Common Objection #2: "Under the OT law, all fornicators were stoned."

Brother Malcomb said this is the second most common objection to the no-exception position. He then tries to show that not all fornicators were stoned to death.

Actually this is a "*straw-man argument*." A *straw-man argument* is an argument that misrepresents an opponent's position. I'm not saying Brother Malcomb did this purposefully. I believe Brother Malcomb sincerely believes what he believes, but he is misrepresenting the true position taught in the scriptures.

According to the scriptures: **A man could not divorce an unfaithful spouse because all unfaithful spouses were to be executed.** That's the Bible position and Brother Malcomb will never be able to refute this.

(It's easy to refute an argument which does not accurately represent an opponent.)

Watch carefully as I go through every possible scenario. I will now prove that divorce on the grounds of fornication was not possible under the OT Mosaic law.

- 1) **Premarital sex between two unmarried, unengaged people** – resulted in a marriage, or a fine. No divorce could take place over this (Dt 22:28-29).
- 2) **Premarital sex with an engaged girl** – resulted in death. No divorce granted here (Dt 22:23-27).
- 3) **Premarital sex discovered in the marriage** – results in death. No divorce granted here (Dt 22:20-21).
- 4) **Adultery (sex with a married woman)** – resulted in death. No divorce here (Dt 22:22).
- 5) **Suspected adultery when the husband has no proof** – dealt with in Num 5:11-31. The woman in question was taken to the priest and given some special water to drink. A curse is placed over her. If she is innocent, nothing happens. If she is guilty, her body swells, rots and then she dies. No divorce here.

In summary, no divorce was granted for fornication, or adultery because the penalty was death for impure brides and wives.

THE CASE OF JOSEPH & MARY?

At least twice, during his sermon, Brother Malcomb brought up the case of Joseph and Mary. Let's read the scripture:

Matthew 1:18-19

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

Supposedly Joseph is thinking adultery on the part of Mary. But how does Brother Malcomb know what Joseph is thinking? Notice the facts of this case:

- Mary was found to be "with child of the Holy Spirit." In other words, Joseph didn't just find out that Mary was pregnant. He found out she was pregnant with a "child of the Holy Spirit."
- Joseph doesn't want to make Mary a "public example." Why? Because the child she is carrying was "of the Holy Spirit" and Joseph knew that.
- Why then was Joseph wanting to divorce Mary? Let the Bible speak:

Matthew 1:20

20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

What was the problem? Joseph was afraid. What's he afraid of? He's afraid to marry a woman who is having a child "of the Holy Spirit." You would be afraid to marry a woman like that too.

(If you wouldn't be afraid, you ought to be!)

- No doubt Mary herself told Joseph about the angel appearing to her.
- No doubt Joseph himself heard about Elizabeth having a child in her old age (Lk 1).

- He probably heard about Elizabeth prophesying in a "loud voice" and declaring that Mary would had a holy child in her womb (Lk 1:42-43).
- Joseph was pondering over all these miraculous events and was very afraid to marry a woman who was miraculously bearing the holy child – a child "of the Holy Spirit."

But this gets even more interesting.

- Brother Malcomb thinks Joseph was broken hearted to learn that Mary was having a baby.
- Brother Malcomb thinks Joseph, with his broken heart, decides to divorce Mary secretly.
- But Brother Malcomb has stated that the reason men divorced their wives in the OT days was because of "*hardness of their hearts.*"
- He said only hard-hearted men divorced their wives and the only reason they divorced them in those days was for fornication.

Respectfully I say: **He can't have it both ways!** Either Joseph is broken hearted or he's hard-hearted. Now which one was he? If Joseph is indeed thinking Mary committed fornication, is he broken hearted or hard-hearted when he decides to put her away?

The fact of the matter is: **Brother Malcomb is "begging the question" again.** He's assuming what he needs to prove. He must prove Joseph was going to divorce Mary on the grounds of fornication.

- If Joseph thought Mary was truly an adulteress, he should have reported her to the elders of the city and they should have stoned Mary to death – that's what the Mosaic Law taught (Dt 22:20-21).

DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4

We move on.

We come now to Brother Malcomb's remarks on Dt 24:1-4. Brother Malcomb believes Jesus was merely commenting on Dt 24 when He was speaking to the Pharisees in Mt 19:9. Listen to the following comments made by Brother Malcomb:

I know the word "uncleanness" in Dt 24 is ERVAH and it means "sexual mis-favor" and I guess you could throw that out there and make it mean an awful lot. But we believe Jesus was the commentator of that verse. Therefore we believe

He knew what that "uncleanness" was. ... I believe it was something you had to find when you married her – something that marriage enabled you to know, "I found her not a maid." These examples seem to prove that to us.

(M40 – Dt 24 premarital unchastity)

Now, that only took 32 seconds for him to say all that, but he said a lot right there. What did Brother Malcomb say?

- He's saying the "uncleanness" of Dt 24 is premarital sex which is discovered on the wedding day.
- He's saying the man discovered on the wedding day the wife he married was not a virgin and he therefore wants to put her away.
- This is supposedly the situation Jesus was discussing in Mt 19:9.

Think about this carefully – this is a little complicated. I'm going to repeat it just to make sure we have the situation clearly in our thinking.

Supposedly Dt 24 is teaching that the only reason a man can divorce his wife and marry another woman is this: **He discovered on his wedding day the bride was not a virgin.**

There are three problems with this interpretation:

PROBLEM #1: The second husband is permitted to divorce the woman.

Deuteronomy 24:2-3

2 when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife,

3 if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, ...

If the only cause for divorce under Mosaic Law was premarital unchastity on the part of the wife, how could this second husband divorce her? Didn't he know she wasn't a virgin to begin with? Didn't he know already, since she was divorced, that she was not a virgin? Was he allowed to marry a woman whom he knew was not a virgin and then divorce her later because she wasn't a virgin on wedding day?

PROBLEM #2: The divorced woman of Dt 24 is allowed to remarry; the divorced woman of Mt 19 is not allowed to remarry.

This is a big problem. Let's read both passages carefully and take notes:

Deuteronomy 24:2

2 ... she [departs from the first husband's] house, and goes and becomes another man's wife,

So this divorced woman is allowed to remarry in Dt 24. Now let's read what Jesus said:

Matthew 19:9

9 ... whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

This divorced woman is not allowed to remarry. Whoever marries her "commits adultery" Jesus said. The two passages do not teach the same thing. They cannot be harmonized. They are two separate laws. Jesus was not commenting on Dt 24 when He spoke Mt 19:9.

PROBLEM #3: God divorced Israel.

Think about this carefully. Brother Malcomb said the only scriptural grounds for divorce under Mosaic Law was if the wife was discovered to be impure on the wedding day.

But God married Israel. She was a pure bride when He married her (Ezk 16:1-14). After many years of marriage, Israel became an adulterous wife (Ezk 16:15-38). Because of this unfaithfulness, God divorced Israel and Judah (Ezk 16:38; Isa 50:1). There are two questions here which Brother Malcomb needs to answer:

- Question #1: Was God putting away a wife who was impure on the wedding day or was he putting away a wife who became unfaithful many days later? (To ask this question is to answer it.)
- Question #2: Was God being "hard hearted" when He put this unfaithful wife away? (Remember, Jesus is supposedly teaching Mosaic Law in Mt 19:9 and supposedly only hard-hearted men divorced impure brides who were not virgins on wedding day. So is God being hard-hearted when He divorces Israel?)

Surely you can see all the difficulties involved when Mt 19:9 is misapplied.

- Mt 19:9 is not Mosaic Law.
- It is not hard-hearted to divorce an unrepentant, cheating wife.
- Fornication is more than premarital unchastity.

Brother Malcomb has not proven his case – though he sincerely believes he has.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (AGAIN)

Late in his sermon Brother Malcomb brings the Sermon on the Mount back up. He attempts to show that Jesus is merely correcting misunderstandings regarding Mosaic Law. Listen to the following remarks:

"That whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." And I've had brethren read that to me and say, "See, Jesus taught differently from the law." Come on! Surely you know better!

(M44 - COME ON - Mt 5v27-28)

Brother Malcomb begins an effort to show Jesus was merely clarifying Mosaic Law. He shows the OT condemned lusting after a woman. But Brother Malcomb misses the point completely. No one is denying that Mosaic Law condemned lust, but Jesus is teaching something new here. Under Mosaic Law (the ten commandments) adultery was one law and lust was a separate law.

- The 7th commandment was: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14).
- The 10th commandment was: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" (Ex 20:17).

Jesus now takes these two separate commandments and makes the one law:

Matthew 5:27-28

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

For emphasis, I say again: Jesus is combining two laws into one new law.

If lust and adultery were one and the same under Mosaic Law, then men should have been stoned to death for lusting after women – because stoning was the penalty for adultery (Dt 22:22). Men were not stoned for lusting, because lusting was one law and adultery was a different law. Jesus combines both and makes a new law in Mt 5:28.

Matthew 7:28

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at **His teaching**,

The people listening to Jesus were not astonished at Moses' teachings. They were astonished at Jesus' teaching. This Sermon on the Mount was not Mosaic Law – it was kingdom law. The Sermon on the Mount was the teachings of Jesus:

Matthew 7

24 "Therefore whoever hears **these sayings of Mine**, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

26 "But everyone who hears **these sayings of Mine**, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:

QUESTIONS NOT ANSWERED

Before closing this review, I wish to point out a question which Brother Malcomb did not answer – critical question which deserves an answer.

QUESTION: How could Mt 19:9 apply in a society which allowed polygamy?

Supposedly Mt 19:9 is merely clarifying Mosaic Law – so says Malcomb Kniffen and his brethren. Supposedly, under Mosaic Law, if a man divorced his wife for trivial causes, and then married another woman, he would be committing adultery because now he would have two living wives.

The problem is: **Having two living wives under Mosaic Law was not a problem**. Suppose a man under Mosaic Law didn't divorce at all. Suppose he simply out-right married another woman without divorcing the first wife at all. Would this man be committing adultery? No, because the OT allowed polygamy.

Exodus 21:9-10

9 And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters.

10 **If [the son] takes another wife**, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights.

God Himself gave King David a plurality of wives (2 Sam 12:8). It was not adultery under the OT to have two living wives. It was not adultery to have ten living wives. But Mt 19:9 allows only one wife. You see, Mt 19:9 cannot be harmonized under a system which allowed polygamy. Brother Malcomb never dealt with this issue.

CONCLUSION

In closing, let me say one more time that I do not doubt Brother Malcom's sincerity, but I do disagree with his doctrine and with his conclusions.

As demonstrated in this review, the no-exception doctrine makes many unwarranted claims and dangerous assumptions. In closing, I will summarize what we have learned in this review:

- 1) It is not "safe" to tell people they should not remarry if they have the right to remarry (1 Cor 7:1-9).
- 2) It is a "doctrine of demons" to forbid marriage to people who have the right to be married (1 Tim 4:1-3).
- 3) Jesus taught gospel law openly to the multitudes (Mt 4:23).
- 4) Jesus did not teach any doctrine privately which He had not already taught publicly (Jn 18:20).
- 5) The trap laid by the Pharisees was an effort to entangle King Herod with Jesus – hoping Herod would kill Jesus like he had previously killed John the Baptist.
- 6) The Pharisees would not have been justified in crucifying Jesus if they caught Jesus teaching gospel law publicly – just like they would not have been justified in crucifying Jesus if they caught Him teaching gospel law privately. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was completely unjustified!
- 7) In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not say: "If someone teaches gospel law which is different than Mosaic Law, he will be least in the kingdom of heaven." Instead, Jesus said: "Whoever breaks one of the least commandments and teaches others to do so, he will be called least in the kingdom of heaven." Teaching the gospel did not break the law. The law itself predicted the Messiah would teach and inaugurate a new law.
- 8) When Jesus was asked the present-tense question, "Is it lawful," Jesus referred to the past law, the present law, and finally the future gospel law. He did not refer to Mosaic Law alone in Mt 19. Even Brother Malcomb concedes this point.
- 9) Brother Malcomb's use of Eph 5 falls short of proving anything. Although Brother Malcomb said a church could depart from Christ and "remain unmarried" and still be acceptable with God, that is simply not true.
- 10) Brother Malcomb treats 1 Cor 7 just like the Baptist preacher treats Jn 3:16. When the Baptist preacher doesn't see baptism mentioned in Jn 3:16, he assumes baptism is not necessary. Likewise, when Brother Malcomb doesn't see an exception in 1 Cor 7, he assumes there is no exception. In both cases, we encourage Bible students to consult all relevant passages pertaining to the subject and do not exclude either baptism nor the exception simply because they are not mentioned in Jn 3:16 or 1 Cor 7 respectively.
- 11) Under Mosaic Law, there was no divorce for fornication. When a married or engaged woman was found guilty of fornication, the law always required the death penalty.

- 12) Joseph was not suspicious of Mary. He was "afraid" of her because she was going to have a "child of the Holy Spirit." This fear motivated him to seek a divorce, but God told him in a dream to not be afraid.
- 13) Dt 24:1-4 cannot be harmonized with Mt 19:9. Dt 24 allows the divorced woman to remarry. Mt 19:9 does not allow anyone to remarry the divorced woman. These are two separate laws. Jesus is not commenting on Dt 24 when He gives His new law in Mt 19:9.
- 14) When God divorced unfaithful Israel (Isa 50:1), He was not divorcing a bride who was found to be impure on wedding day. He was divorcing a wife who had become guilty after many days of marriage.
- 15) When God divorced unfaithful Israel (Isa 50:1), it was not because He was hard-hearted. Men are not hard-hearted when they divorce unrepentant, fornicating wives.
- 16) When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He was teaching "His sayings" (Mt 7:24, 26, 29). As the prophet said, "Many were astonished" (Isa 52:14) because the Messiah was teaching new things which "they had not heard" (Isa 52:15).
- 17) Mt 5:27-28 is clearly NT doctrine for Jesus is now combining two separate laws into one new law. Whereas the law against adultery was one law and lust was a separate law, Jesus combines the two. Under the gospel law, when a man lusts, he's not just sinning any more – he's committing adultery in his heart now.
- 18) Finally, the no-exception position cannot explain how Mt 19:9 could possibly work under a system which allowed polygamy. Under Mosaic Law, it was not adultery for a man to have more than one living wife. Under Mosaic Law a man could divorce for trivial causes and marry another woman without committing adultery. That same man could also keep his first wife, and marry two more women at the same time and he would still not be committing adultery – because the Mosaic Law permitted polygamy (Ex 21:9-10).

Thank you for considering this review.

I close by leaving a standing, public invitation to Brother Malcomb Kniffen to have a public discussion over the matter of divorce and remarriage.

- I love Brother Malcomb.
- He is a sincere man.
- But he is embracing and teaching a false doctrine.