

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 (1 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 on the basis of 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!

M,D,R 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 Strait*, 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 M,D,R 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 and unjustified division.

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