

Review notes on the book:

"Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, The Uniform Teaching Of Moses, Jesus, and Paul"

The following is a review of a book authored by Samuel G. Dawson, published by Gospel Themes Press, 2002. The outline headings in this review are not the words of this writer but correspond to the chapter numbers and section titles used by Samuel Dawson in his book with his page numbers to follow in brackets. Greek and Hebrew words are in all upper case.

In his book, Samuel Dawson develops a doctrine which espouses lawful divorce for the cause of indecency. The review that follows is a critical examination of the arguments and reasoning presented by Samuel Dawson in his work. The reader is encouraged to investigate whether or not the scriptures actually support his teaching.

Divorce for the Cause of Indecency

"Introduction" [1]

Dawson's plea for reliance on God's word is commendable (page 5, paragraph 4). Open-mindedness is a noble concept as well (pg 3), but it must not become an over-willingness to accept ideas simply because they are novel without examining their truthfulness.

I. "What makes a marriage?" [9]

For clarification, by marriage being a "private affair" (pg 21, pr 2) Dawson must mean without formal court license rather than "not public." The giving and taking of wives in Old Testament times was a civil matter done in the knowledge of the public, yet not necessarily with documented legal action. The public needs to be aware of the covenant ratified, as illustrated in account of Abraham and Sarah's encounter with Abimelech (Genesis 20). Nevertheless, in cultures where a court licence is available and is the norm in society for marriage, couples who would marry need to be satisfying that requirement, subjecting themselves to those laws as from God, as long as no conflict exists with God's law (Romans 13:1-7). Men and women who privately consider themselves virtually married by a quick "back seat" impromptu exchange of vows without public witness or acknowledgement are committing fornication.

Dawson's notes concerning the involvement of churches with weddings is right on target, and it is refreshing to see someone write sensibly about it. All that is required for a marriage is a license as civil law could mandate and ratification as by spoken vows before proper witnesses. That's all. A "wedding" typically includes, pageantry, gowns, flowers, candles, gifts, secular music, dancing, food, beverages, photographers, and limousine service. All of these are additions, not expedencies to the work ordained for the church. A marriage and a wedding are two distinct things. Adam and Eve were married, but they had no wedding. The wedding is a ceremony originating from the customs and traditions of men. Marriage originates from God.

A wedding ceremony is a decidedly social affair. Those claiming it belongs in church functions will argue that since gospel preaching, a form of worship, is conducted during the ceremony, it is authorized. They fail to understand that expedencies must not add to the action. More than preaching is being conducted, so it is not an expediency for teaching the gospel any more than would be a dinner social, where we would most certainly have prayer, which is another worship form. A study of authority in religion will bear this out.

II. "Violations of Marriage" [23]

A. "Fornication" [25]

To clarify, the word PORNEIA is actually translated "sexual immorality" in the NAS and not merely "immorality," as Dawson states (pg 25, pr 4), but it's still a terrible translation. The point he develops from here about the word "immorality" not conveying the true meaning of PORNEIA therefore misses the point, as will become abundantly clear later. The adjective in front of "immorality" must be considered. More will be stated about this later.

Likewise, the true meaning of Thayer's definition becomes distorted when Dawson omits the adjective "sexual" in front of the word "intercourse" (pg 25, pr 5). Thayer did not define PORNEIA as "intercourse;" he said "sexual intercourse." It conveys quite a different meaning, as diligence will bear out. From here, again, the point Dawson develops about the common man's musings regarding the word "intercourse" is pointless, since that is not even what Thayer said.

Dawson continues by expounding on what the word "intercourse" meant in Thayer's day (continuing to ignore that Thayer actually said "sexual intercourse") (pg 26, pr 1). He is oblivious to the fact that even today, 133 years after Thayer's work, the top two English definitions for "intercourse" according to Merriam-Webster are (1) "connection or dealings between persons or groups;" (2) "exchange especially of thoughts or feelings." A sexual connotation is not conveyed in these definitions today as well, so he develops another pointless point.

There is a clear difference between "intercourse" and "sexual intercourse," which involves the third definition given by Merriam-Webster: "physical sexual contact between individuals that involves the genitalia of at least one person." It continues to explain that this is not limited to only coitus but also includes other physical contact of sexual body parts. With a little further Bible study we will be able to clearly see what Thayer meant by "sexual intercourse." For now, it is sufficient to say that applying the generic meaning of "intercourse" (that is, "activity and involvement") to the specific meaning of "sexual intercourse" is a gross mishandling of words.

The definition of PORNEIA is much more developed by Greek scholars than that which is presented by Dawson. If we take a closer look, we will find that it is a very general term and thus includes many different but distinct activities. Thayer offers the following definition: "1) Illicit sexual intercourse; a) adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, etc.; b) sexual intercourse with close relatives; c) sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman." According to Friberg it is "every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse."

Three key points are noted in these definitions:

1. Fornication always involves activity with another. This would include same or opposite sex relations or even bestiality. The point is, you can't commit fornication by yourself. Therefore, only viewing pornography or lusting after another is not fornication because it is the action of one. These things are therefore not cause for scriptural divorce, though they are nonetheless sinful and immoral. Jesus said that if a man lusts after a woman he has committed adultery already in his heart. Some have asked if this adultery in the heart is cause for lawful divorce. It is not, because it involves the actions of only one and is thus not actually fornication.
2. Fornication always involves physical sexual contact of some kind. Kissing and hugging not involving intimate contact is physical contact, but it is not sexual and therefore not fornication. Also, so-called phone sex cannot be fornication because the contact between individuals is not physical. Please don't misunderstand, it is nonetheless immoral and sinful if engaged with other than your spouse, but it simply is not fornication. The statement was earlier made that "sexual immorality" is an unfortunate translation of PORNEIA in the NAS. It comes into play here. The use of pornography, internet and phone sex with other than spouse, lust, publically wearing indecent apparel, and vulgar speech are all forms of sexual immorality, but they are not fornications because they do not involve physical sexual contact with another.
3. Fornication always involves illicit or lawless behavior. The New Testament indicates that sexual relations are lawful only between a lawfully married man and woman. Modern-day preachers in false religion teach that the Bible does not condemn sex between unmarried couples but only condemns harlotry, incest, and adultery. This is not true; see 1 Corinthians 7:2, 8, 9. If sex is lawful between unmarried couples, the apostle would not have said in verse 2 that, in order to avoid fornication, a man should take a wife and a woman should take a husband. Again, if pre-marital sex is okay, he would not have instructed unmarried couples in verses 8 and 9 to get married to satisfy their burning desires. Fornication therefore includes sex between unmarried couples and sex with someone who has been put away by their spouse.

Look further at the Bible usages of "fornication" and see if the more generic terms "activity" or "involvement" appropriately fit the description. The word is used of a man who would sexually "touch" a woman to whom he is not married (1 Corinthians 7:1, 2); adultery, which is extra-marital sex (Matthew 19:9); homosexuality (Romans 1:26-28); harlotry and prostitution (1 Timothy 1:9, 10); incest (1 Corinthians 5:1); and bestiality (Leviticus 20:15, 16). The Bible clearly uses the word very specifically in connection with physical sexual contact: the kind of thing a man does with a prostitute. Mere "activity" and "involvement" are terms too general for fornication as it is described in scripture. Fornication is physical, sexual contact between two individuals not lawfully married.

Dawson correctly assesses fondling as fornication (pg 26, 27), as described in Ezekiel 23:1-3. This assessment is correct, not because it is generically "sexual activity or involvement" (pg 26, pr 1), but because, by definition, it specifically involves physical contact with private body parts of another who is not a spouse.

By suggesting a description of fornication more generic than scripture and investigation would support, Dawson begins his departure from sound reasoning.

III. "Divorce Under Moses" [41]

A. "Seeing Someone's Sexual Nakedness Dishonorably..." [55]

Dawson continues making word mistakes with his comments in connection with GERVAH (Heb: "nakedness," "indecent") and PORNEIA (Gr: "fornication") (pg 56, pr 3). Of Ezekiel 16:36 Dawson writes, "This passage is important because here GERVAH is used synonymously with PORNEIA...." This one statement contains a great deal of word wrangling. First, according to Merriam-Webster, a synonym is "one of two or more words or expressions of the same language that have the same or nearly the same meaning in some or all senses." It is important to note that GERVAH cannot be a synonym for PORNEIA because they are from different languages. It is also important to note that synonyms do not necessarily have the exact same meaning but can have a similar meaning. For example "love" is not synonymous with AGAPE. They are from different languages. One may be used to interpret the other, though their true meanings are only closely similar.

Dawson fails to recognize the difference between synonyms and words used connectively. The Hebrew text in Ezekiel 16 stands on its own without support from the Septuagint. Ezekiel writes, "...your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers....:" Here, "nakedness" is GERVAH (Heb: "shameful exposure"), and "harlotries" is TAZNUWTH (Heb: "fornication"). Just because the Hebrew word for "nakedness" is used in connection with the Hebrew word for "fornication" or in some cases implies it by metonymy does not mean that fornication means nakedness.

More needs to be said about GERVAH. In every Old Testament usage, the word refers to nakedness and shameful things, but it is not always sexual nudity. For example, the word appears in Genesis 42:9 regarding an unprotected part of a country. The use is clearly metaphorical, yet the connotation is not sexual but a shameful exposure to vulnerability. The word is also used within Deuteronomy 23:9-14 concerning the proper disposal of excrement. Though a man has to expose himself in this process, he is instructed to remove himself to a secluded place because of the shame. Interestingly, the shameful thing he is to cover using his shovel is his feces, not his body. Once more, the word appears within Isaiah 20:3, 4 denoting destitution and the ill treatment of prisoners to their shame. Dawson makes note of these occurrences but fails to openly recognize that the word is not always referring to nakedness associated with sexual shame.

We understand that words used associatively do not become synonyms. For example, in Colossians 1:15, Paul writes, "...having made peace through the blood of His cross...." Here, the word "blood" is used in connection with "cross." Paul even uses these words interchangeably regarding Christ. In Ephesians 2:13 he says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Then, in verse 16 he says, "...and might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross...." Notwithstanding, the words "blood" and "cross" have distinct meanings, though connected. "Blood" (by metonymy in the context of one's death) generically means giving up one's life by any means. "Cross" (by metonymy in the context of one's death) specifically means crucifixion. It would be nonsense to speak of the "cross of Abel;" he didn't die by crucifixion (Matthew 23:35). "Cross" is more specific; "blood" is more generic and would include "cross." Likewise, "fornication" is more specific; "indecent" is more generic and would include "fornication."

Dawson is building upon false premises, and when he takes this further, the fallacy of his reasoning multiplies, as we will see.

B. "GERVAH Is Translated By ASKEMON In The Septuagint" [56]

Dawson makes yet further mistakes on word meanings. He claims that the New Testament word for "indecent," ASKEMON, "implies sexual nakedness consistently..." (pg 57). In spite of his plea for open-mindedness, he is close-mindedly convinced of this, and he has no reasonable support for it.

First, look at what the lexicographers say about ASKEMON. Thayer: "1) unseemliness, an unseemly deed 1a) of a woman's genitals 1b) of one's nakedness, shame." Friberg: "strictly, shamelessness (1) shameless deed, indecent behavior; (2) as being without proper clothing to cover private body parts nakedness, shame." Louw-Nida: "to act in defiance of social and moral standards, with resulting disgrace, embarrassment, and shame - 'to act shamefully, indecent behavior, shameful deed.'" Vine: "shapeless, the opposite of EUSCHEMON." Clearly, the word ASKEMON pertains to any kind of disgraceful, rude, unbecoming, or indecent behavior. By definition, it certainly applies to sexual disgracefulness, but it is not limited to such.

We must understand that the Bible is not a lexicon. When the writers put pen to parchment, the Holy Spirit used words the common people already understood. He did not invent a new vocabulary but spoke to them in familiar words. This is why Paul could say, "when you read you can understand" (Ephesians 3:4). Moreover, Bible students are familiar with the distinction between generic and specific terminology. If a New Testament writer speaks in generic terminology but gives a specific example, it does not change the generic meaning of the word. For example, the word meaning "disorderly" in 2 Thessalonians 3: 6, 7, and 11 (ATAKTOS) has been changed by some to mean specifically "idle," supposedly due to the context of laziness. According to the reasoning presented, since this exact

Greek word is used consistently in the context of laziness, then this must be the new special meaning that the Holy Spirit has assigned to this word. This reasoning is completely unsound and will ultimately result in false doctrine. Actually, when Paul said "disorderly" (ATAKTOS) the readers already knew what he meant. Likewise, when he said "unseemly" (ASKEMON) the readers already knew what he meant. The way Paul uses the word does not change its meaning, even if every time he uses it, sexual impropriety is the subject matter (which is not even the case).

Dawson speaks presumptuously when he claims the word ASKEMON "implies sexual nakedness consistently." Not only do the definitions provided by scholars not support this, but neither do the scriptures. He says 1 Corinthians 13:5 "is undoubtedly referring to indecency in the sexual realm, here to a spouse who loves his partner not being sexually unfaithful..." (pg 58, pr 3). This is pure conjecture on Dawson's part. He pleads for open-mindedness, but his mind is closed to the notion that this could be anything other than specifically sexual misconduct. If Paul had meant to say here that love does not fornicate, he would have used the word PORNEIA, as he did in Ephesians 5:2, 3 with reference to walking in love. Sadly, Dawson takes the teeth out of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:5. In his interpretation, unmarried people can take no admonition from this. Nonsense. Paul is teaching simply that love does not allow any rude or otherwise unbecoming behavior among any of us.

One last point on this will show the utter fallacy of Dawson's reasoning. Greek scholars indicate that ASKEMON is simply the opposite of EUSCHEMON, which means "in a seemly manner" (Thayer), "elegant in figure, well formed, graceful" (W. E. Vine). This word appears in 1 Corinthians 14:40 where Paul states that our worship assemblies should be conducted in a decent and orderly manner. He is obviously not limiting the decency of our worship services to sexual decency. Though idol worship among the citizens of Corinth would have included fornication, we understand that there would already be not a hint of this among Christians (Ephesians 5:3). Paul is simply instructing us, in part, to come together for worship with a decorum befitting the solemn occasion.

IV. "Jesus Correctly Interpreted Moses To The Jews" [64]

The next mistake Dawson makes is in assuming that everything Jesus teaches in His sermon on the mount is merely an explanation of Mosaic doctrine (pg 65, pr 2). This conclusion is in no way forced from the text, yet Dawson devotes his entire fourth chapter to illustrating this, citing example after example of times when Jesus actually did just that, intentionally omitting the teaching on divorce to be covered in chapter 5. There is no argument that Jesus certainly did that throughout this sermon and on many other occasions. However, if Jesus' teaching was not always limited to Mosaic interpretations, then there is no reason to shun the idea that He could have been revealing laws on divorce unique to the New Covenant in His sermon on the mount. Consider some cases where Jesus' teaching transcends Moses' law.

1. Jesus taught and practiced baptism (John 3:22-4:2). Nothing is stated in the Old Testament regarding the rite of baptism. Baptism did not originate from an interpretation of Moses' law.
2. Consider Christ's teaching on withdrawal from those who persist in sin (Matthew 18:15-17). Jesus taught much concerning His kingdom, the church. When He said to Peter, "I will build My church," He was not talking about the nation of Israel as a group called out under the law of Moses. Likewise, when Jesus instructed them to "tell it to the church" (Matthew 18:17), He was not interpreting the intent of Moses' law on discipline (Deut 19:15-21); He was revealing the doctrine pertaining to discipline in the church in perfect harmony with the teaching to be later contained in the epistles.
3. Jesus taught concerning the Lord's Supper, a rite foreign to the Old Testament. Concerning this, Paul declares that he delivered to the Corinthians the exact same instructions that the Lord delivered on the night of His betrayal (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

Beyond this, scripture makes clear that Jesus was a lawgiver. This is the point God the Father makes on the mount of transfiguration. Here, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus before Peter, James, and John. In Moses and Elijah, the "law and the prophets" have full representation. When Peter suggests building them all three tabernacles, the voice from heaven makes apparent that divine authority is no longer in Moses and the prophets but in the Son alone.

Once we accept that Jesus could very well have been revealing unique New Testament doctrine concerning divorce in His ministry, we should objectively look at what Jesus actually says about it.

V. "Jesus On Divorce Under Moses" [124]

Dawson solidly affirms that Jesus' teaching and Moses' teaching on divorce are exactly the same (pg 125, pr 1). Let's take a look.

Jesus says that the only lawful reason for divorce is fornication. Moses says the only lawful reason for divorce is uncleanness. We have well established that these are not exactly the same; one is more specific than the other. Uncleanness includes fornication, but it also includes indecent apparel and vulgar speech, for examples. Fornication is more specific, and it does not include indecent apparel and vulgar speech. Dawson would suppose that Jesus was only interpreting Moses' law or explaining it. Assuming Moses did not make himself clear, Dawson would have us

believe that Jesus is here finally revealing the true intent that was cloaked in obscurity for centuries (pg 141, pr 1). Not so. David truthfully writes, "The law of the Lord is perfect" (Psa 19:7). The writing of the law and the prophets was everything a man needed to know to do right (Luke 16:29). It was not necessary for Jesus to clarify Moses' law.

Jesus also says that whoever marries a divorced person commits adultery (Matthew 5:32), unless the divorced person had put away his spouse because of fornication (Matthew 19:9). Moses' law permits the one put away for uncleanness to remarry (Deut 24:2). This is not the same thing; Jesus is not teaching the same as Moses. Dawson doesn't even try to rectify this.

Jesus had the authority to here ordain these things as divine law (Matthew 28:18).

A. "'Doesn't the Whosoever Refer to More Than Just Jews?'" [132]

Once Dawson convinces himself that Jesus is only elaborating on Moses' law to which only His Jewish hearers at that time were subject, the natural conclusion is that the statements of Christ have no jurisdiction for us today (pg 121, pr 3; pg 134). The conclusion is true only if the premise is true. However, Dawson continues to make untrue statements about the teaching of Christ.

Dawson explains well the antecedent of "whosoever" in Jesus' teaching. The people to whom law is given are the ones subject to that law, whosoever they are. However, we must remember that the Gentiles were yet under a divine law during the age when the Jews were under the Mosaic dispensation. The dispensation of the Patriarchs still endured for the nations. When Dawson asks, "What law?," he assumes Moses' (pg 138, pr 1), but we shall see otherwise.

Concerning Matthew 5 and 19, Dawson writes, "There's no law other than the [Mosaic] law the Jews lived under in the context" (pg 133, pr 1). This is simply not true. We have already shown that the words of Jesus are different from the words of Moses. "Other law" involved here includes the law Christ delivers concerning divorce which transcends Moses' law.

That's not all. Look carefully at Matthew 19. The Pharisees ask, "Is it lawful?" (vs 3). They may have very well been thinking in terms of Moses' law, but observe how Jesus responds: "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (vs 4, 5). These are direct quotes from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. This is not Moses' law but the dispensation of the Patriarchs. Further, the Pharisees ask about the bill of divorcement allowed by Moses' law (vs 7), but Jesus responds again not so much in reference to the dispensation of Moses but to the dispensation of the Patriarchs: "From the beginning it was not so" (vs 8). Little of what Jesus says here has anything to do with Moses' law.

Looking ahead, Dawson revisits this on page 170. He claims that, if the Pharisees ask their question with reference to Moses' law and Jesus answers apart from Moses' law without telling them he is doing so, Jesus doesn't actually answer the question. From this, Dawson concludes that Jesus could only have been elaborating on Moses' law. Actually, Jesus' response does not have to come from Moses' law to be a legitimate answer. Let us humbly accept that Jesus had the authority here to answer however he willed. He often gave an answer contrary to the way people thought He should (John 2:18, 19). Besides, Jesus makes clear the law upon which His answer is based.

Notwithstanding, Dawson concludes, "To apply these passages outside the Jewish context is to apply them falsely" (pg 134). He continues, "In short, the gospels are a Jewish story, not a Christian story" (pg 138, pr 2). These statements are based purely upon supposition with no reasonable scriptural support.

VI. "Divorce Under Christ - 1 Cor 7:1-16" [142]

Dawson supposes that Christ's teaching is limited to the Jews living at His time (pg 141, pr 1). One of the ten commandments given to the Jews was to not commit adultery. This does not mean that adultery among the Gentiles was acceptable to God (Romans 2:10-16). Herod was not actually a Jew, yet John held him accountable for his adultery (Mark 6:17, 18). Jesus is not here teaching the law of Moses for the Jews; He is teaching the law of God for mankind.

This idea that God's law on moral conduct was for Jews only leads Dawson to his next misunderstanding: "We consider for the first time teaching on the subject directed toward Christians... to the first teaching in scriptures not addressed to Jews under Moses' law, but to both Jew and Gentile Christians under law to Christ, 1 Corinthians 7:1-6" (pg 141 pr 2). This is completely wrong. Incontrovertibly, the very first teaching in scripture on this subject appears in Genesis 1 and 2, the very passages which Christ Himself indicates. These words come at a time when there are no Jews, Gentiles, Christians, or non-Christians; these words are directed and applicable to mankind for all time. Moreover, we need to recognize that every living soul today is amenable to the law of Christ. God only has one law now; He does not have one law for Christians and another law for non-Christians. This will be a key as we go further. Among Christians, Dawson will suppose one law for "normal marriages," one for the "unhappily married," and another for "mixed marriages."

A. "vv2-7: Normal Marriages" [143]

Concerning 1 Corinthians 7:7-9, he writes, "Paul will affirm that all men cannot contain their sexual desires outside of marriage.... God made some so that they cannot contain their sexual desires outside of marriage" (pg 144, pr 1). Dawson assumes the reason they cannot contain themselves is because God made them that way. This is preposterous: the text simply and clearly does not say that. God demands we exercise self-control at all times regardless of the circumstance (Galatians 5:23). God does not require of a man something he is intrinsically incapable of doing, but He gives us whatever we need every moment (1 Corinthians 10:13). If we lose our self-control, it is because we have chosen to do so. We will never have the right to blame God for our lack of self-control (James 1:13-14). This is the common cry of those unwilling to own the accountability for their actions. God certainly makes us all with different strengths and weaknesses, but this excuses no one for serving the flesh.

Referring to Paul, Dawson continues, "His gift was that he could control his sexual desires..., all men don't have this ability" (pg 147, pr 3). This is completely contrary to the actual statements of the scriptural context. Look carefully: Paul states, "For I wish that all men were **even as I** myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain **even as I** am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry..." (1 Corinthians 7:7-9). What does Paul mean when he says, "Even as I?" In what state was Paul? Unmarried. Dawson assumes he means having self-control, but Paul is simply making reference to his marital status. Stating that it is better for the unmarried to remain like Paul, if maintaining self-control is the meaning, then to become NOT like Paul would be to not have self-control. However, if being unmarried is the meaning, then to become NOT like Paul would be to become married, and that is exactly what he says! "Let them marry." Dawson fails to consider that Paul's gift is not that he can control himself but that he is fortunately single. Dawson's conclusion is based upon nothing more than conjecture.

B. "vv10-11: The Unhappily Married" [148]

Dawson emphasizes that God's law here is for Christians. That's true, but it's not limited to Christians but applicable to all men. He writes, "The command is for Christians not to depart" (pg 148, pr 5); "If a Christian treacherously divorces his mate, he has violated a plain commandment from God" (pg 150, pr 2); "Paul taught Christians..." (pg 150, pr 3).

In the two verses now being considered, Paul is dealing with married people and divorced people. The idea of being "unhappily" married is entirely injected by Dawson. In verse 10, Paul simply reiterates what Jesus said: if you're married, do not put away your spouse. Whether they are happy or unhappy is completely beside the point and therefore unstated. In verse 11, Paul is talking about one who is divorced, having her marriage dissolved. (We know this because he tells her to remain unmarried, which would not have been a sensible requirement of one actually married). This is not someone "unhappily married;" this is someone actually divorced. Consistent with the teaching of Christ, Paul admonishes her not to marry another, which would cause her to commit adultery. Dawson's assessments of this couple's rights are completely correct. His danger is to regard that there is some special rule here for "unhappily married" Christians different from those in "normal marriages." The teaching is the same for all: Christians and non-Christians, happy and unhappy.

C. "vv12-16: Mixed Marriages" [150]

Dawson claims that "Jesus didn't address mixed marriages in His earthly teaching" (pg 151, pr 1 and 4). When Jesus delivers his law concerning divorce, he refers all the way back to The Garden of Eden for His foundation. The forced conclusion is that this is God's law for mankind for all time. Simply because there was no such thing as "mixed marriages" in Jesus' day (that is, Christians married to non-Christians), does not mean Jesus' teaching does not apply to them today. The scope of Jesus' teaching is perfectly clear. Whether a couple is Jew, Gentile, Christian, non-Christian, happy, unhappy, or any mixed combination thereof, if they are married, the teaching of Christ applies to them.

Certainly, a reasonable explanation of "to the rest" in Paul's comments is that he is addressing confusions unique to Christians married to non-Christians. Bear in mind that the things generically said in the previous verses would have likewise a generic application, that is, applicable to all people married, unmarried, or widowed, unless some clear exception is expressed. However, it would certainly seem reasonable that, having said this introductory statement, Paul must be preparing to discuss some new thing that Jesus never discussed. If he here reveals some lawful reason for divorce other than fornication, we should see it in his words, but nothing of the sort is implied. In fact, five times in this context, he admonishes them not to put away: verses 10, 11, 12, 13, and 27. Moreover, in verse 39, Paul concludes this subject saying, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." Since Dawson conveniently ignores this verse, we are left to wonder whether he would say Paul is here addressing the "normal marriages," the "unhappily married," or the "mixed marriages" among Christians. Nay, verily, he is simply addressing all married people.

In verse 15, Paul says, "If the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." Dawson supposes that "let him depart" means divine sanction, as he

explains: "Let him do the thing Jesus said no man can do..." (pg 154, pr 6; pg 155, pr 3). This is not divine authority for an unbeliever to put away. Paul says five times in the immediate context not to do it, and that makes it sin, whether he is a Jew, a Gentile, happy, unhappy, a believer or an unbeliever. Besides, Paul's instruction here is directed not at the one leaving but at the one being left, and the verb is in the passive voice. Therefore, instead, this is a divine exhortation for a believer being left behind to passively raise no protest to the unbeliever's sin of desertion. That's something Jesus never specifically discussed, but Paul clearly does not reveal that she has a right to divorce and remarry.

Next, Dawson falters on the age-old dispute over "bound" (DEO) and "under bondage" (DOULOS). He claims they mean essentially the same thing, noting that they probably share their origins and how easily the prepositions "through" and "by" can be interchanged (pg 155, pr 2). This is not surprising, since he has already found a way to make "fornication" mean "indecency" (pg 125, pr 4). He warns of the "blizzard of quotations" used in arguments (pg 155, pr 1), yet what Dawson has presented so far is nothing short of an exegetical blizzard.

The explanation of "bound" and "bondage" is not as complicated as Dawson would suggest. Let's take a brief look at the word meanings and usage. DEO ("bound," vs 39) means "1) to bind tie, fasten 1a) to bind, fasten with chains, to throw into chains 1b) metaph..., put under obligation, of the law, duty etc. 1b2a) to be bound to one, a wife, a husband..." (Thayer). It is used primarily of shackling the wrists and ankles of prisoners (Matthew 14:3; Mark 5:3, 4; Acts 12:6; 21:33). It is also used of tying wheat stalks together in bundles (Matthew 13:30), wrapping a corpse for burial (John 11:44), and hitching an animal as to a post (Mark 11:2). It is used metaphorically of those under great obligation and commitment in a matter (Acts 20:22; Romans 7:2). On the other hand, DOULOS ("under bondage," vs 15) means "1) to make a slave of, reduce to bondage 2) metaph. give myself wholly to one's needs and service, make myself a bondman to him" (Thayer). It is used of the Israelites' slavery in Egypt (Acts 7:6), becoming one's servant (1 Corinthians 9:19), and being in the grip of strong drink (Titus 2:3). The reader does not have to "wear down" to see that DEO indicates being joined to another and DOULOS indicates being controlled by another. The difference in meaning is easy to understand and apply.

Dawson's misunderstanding concerning this is insidious. His conclusion is based upon "I believe..." "It seems apparent..." and the words of a Presbyterian commentator (pg 155, pr 3 and 4). In these paragraphs, Dawson presents his most serious word wrangling yet. He assumes that Paul's teaching in verses 10 - 11 is limited in application to "unhappily married Christians" and is different from his teaching in verse 15, which is limited to "mixed marriages." Dawson sets these two groups in contrast, stating that the "unhappily married Christians" are under obligation to not remarry or else be reconciled, but those in "mixed marriages," are not under obligation to not remarry or else be reconciled. If they are free to remarry, then Paul has indeed revealed another lawful cause for divorce.

This reasoning is all kinds of wrong. First, all such limited applications of God's law to married people on the basis of their happiness or the beliefs of their spouses are entirely derived by supposition. Second, Dawson's conclusion can only be true if DEO means the same thing as DOULOS, which it does not. Third, Dawson assumes that the matter about which the believer is at liberty is the instruction contained in verse 11. That is simply not a forced conclusion in the context.

Concerning the DEO and DOULOS dispute, Dawson states, "The argument is more academic than practical" (pg 155, pr 2). Dawson goes on to present some practical arguments. He declares, "In 99 percent of such cases as this, we know what the unbeliever is going to do after he departs" (pg 155, pr 5). This argument is based upon pure human reasoning. He doesn't cite any real statistics, but it wouldn't matter if he could; doctrinal truth is founded upon scripture, not human statistics.

Next, Dawson mocks the intrinsic impossibility of a wife not being in subjection to a husband who is not there (pg 156, pr 2). His point is that, since it is absurd for Paul to state the obvious, this must only indicate that "not under bondage" means "the breaking of the marriage bond" (pg 155, pr 3). Actually, by taking from verse 15 that the husband is already gone, Dawson creates an equally absurd statement that begs an explanation. He would effectively have Paul saying, "If the unbeliever is gone, let him leave." It is intrinsically impossible to allow someone to leave who is already gone. Instead of trying to harmonize the text, Dawson simply chooses one absurdity over another.

Let's try to apply some sound reasoning to this. In the previous verses Paul's expression is "if he be pleased to dwell..." Now Paul is considering the case of one who would not be so pleased. Such a person will ultimately leave. In all practicality, this leaving is a process by which the man ponders his situation, discusses it with his wife, makes a decision, makes preparations, and leaves. The phrase, "If the unbelieving depart," is present tense, which is viewed as occurring in actual time, "the idea of progress" (Dana and Mantey). This means, therefore, that in his displeasure, he is in the process of departing. He is on his way out but, for the immediate short term, still temporarily there. From this, we can reasonably understand that she need not be in subjection to him. Paul exhorts her to not bother begging him to stay nor to consider compromising her convictions to encourage him to stay. She doesn't need him and will be, quite frankly, better off when he is finally gone. Paul had earlier told husbands and wives to sexually submit their bodies each to the controlling power (authority, EXOUSIAZO) of the other (vs 3 - 5). However, should such a departing unbeliever demand a sexual favor one last time before he goes, Paul gives her every right to turn him away. He is not her master in this case, and she is certainly not his sex slave. How horrific an experience that

would be for her: anything but peaceful. Notwithstanding, nothing in this dialog forces us to conclude that the marriage bond is severed or that she is given the right to remarry. The cessation of DOULOS (the controlling authority) does not necessitate the cessation of DEO (the marriage bond). If Dawson would accept that DEO is different from DOULOS, he would not make this mistake.

In reality, the practical applications of Dawson's reasoning are preposterous. Note some questions. Would it be lawful for an erring Christian to divorce his unbelieving mate in this case? What about a member of an institutional church? What about someone in the Christian Church? How far departed from truth would they have to be before they would not have the right as a "brother" or "sister" to divorce in this case? Suppose a faithful Christian who has so put away her unconsenting, unbelieving husband later falls away from the faith herself? Does that invalidate the divorce? What about a non-Christian who divorces a mate for the same moral reasons a Christian would so divorce an immoral, non-consenting non-believer? Would it not be sin because of not being a "brother" or "sister" as stipulated in 1 Corinthians 7:15? Suppose he learns the truth and eventually becomes a Christian. Does that validate the divorce? Isn't that sin something he should repent of in order to become a Christian? But now, as a Christian, he has the right to do it, or to have done it. Any time we assume that God has different laws for Christians than for non-Christians, we will have this kind of mess.

Concerning God calling us unto peace, Dawson quotes Jay Adams who explains, "Believing (wrongly) that she must remain married to her unbelieving husband, no matter what, a Christian woman holds on even when her husband wants to end their marriage. He may even begin running around with other women.... There is nothing peaceful about that!" (pg 160, pr 3). In the first place, this is not an example of a woman following divine instruction, which is precisely why her life is so unpeaceful. If her unbelieving husband wants to end the marriage, Paul's instruction is to let him do it; do not stand in his way; be passive, raise no protest. It is not shameful to be wrongfully divorced by another. However, the passive "let him depart" does not mean the active "divorce him." Now, if he is running around with other women (fornication is the inferred connotation), she has the right to divorce and remarry. For the sake of peace, Dawson would have her eligible to divorce and remarry, even if there was no fornication. There's absolutely no scriptural ground for that.

VII. "Unscriptural Divorce: The Problem Presented" [163]

Now that Dawson accepts that there is more to fornication than physical sexual contact with another who is not a spouse, he moves to his next misunderstanding: confusing the physical and the imaginary. We begin with Matthew 5:28, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." When taken literally, this is a contradictory statement. Adultery is fornication involving a married person, which requires physical contact; looking is not physical contact. To resolve the apparent contradiction, Dawson simply redefines words; lust is made to mean fornication (pg 165, pr 3). This does not follow sound hermeneutics.

Jesus is actually using a figure of speech called hyperbole, where an exaggeration is utilized to make a point. People tend to rate sins so that some are worse than others. For example, hating is bad, but it's not as bad as murder. God would have us think otherwise. In 1 John 3:15, hate is exaggerated by hyperbole to the point of being equal to murder. Hate is not literally the same as murder, but by such an expression, we understand both are equally condemned. Likewise, those in Jesus' audience might have been thinking lust is a little bad but adultery is very bad. Using hyperbole, lust is exaggerated to the point of being equal to adultery. Lust is not literally the same as adultery, but by such an expression, Jesus teaches us that both are equally wrong. In the very next verses, Jesus uses further hyperbole. He does not expect us to literally gouge out an eye or sever a hand; with an exaggeration, he is teaching us the seriousness of sin.

Dawson is confused over the distinction between that which is literal and that which is figurative, that which is physical and that which is imaginary. Physical action is done with the body; imagined action is done with the mind. Lust and adultery are both sin and will condemn a man, but they are not the same thing, though Dawson claims they are exactly the same (pg 167, pr 1). He claims that the phrase "mental adultery" was foreign to Jesus (pg 167, pr 2). However, Jesus said "adultery...in his heart," and the difference is mere semantics.

Dawson clearly states his position that lasciviousness and uncleanness are grounds for divorce (pg 167, pr 2). Therefore, according to Dawson, a wife can lawfully put away her husband if he is known to use pornography, watch a stripper, tell a vulgar joke, dress indecently, or have "involvement" or "activity" in any other kind of lewd behavior which is not actually fornication. This is pure heresy. Jesus declares only fornication as lawful grounds to put away a spouse. Fornication is well defined, and these things are not fornications. Dawson's personal definition of PORNEIA is not valid.

Dawson is further confused about what actually constitutes a recognizable marriage or divorce. He begins by saying a man cannot commit adultery with his own wife (pg 167, pr 4; pg 168, pr 2). This is wrong; he most certainly can. Jesus said "Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." If he is married to her, she is his wife. Dawson will argue that God does not "recognize" that marriage. There is a difference between recognizing a thing and approving of it. God can recognize that people are married and still disapprove of it (Mark 6:17, 18). Marrying and divorcing are human actions. God gives us free will. People marry and divorce each other at will (Matthew 24:38), and God is aware of them all. The action of God in this is binding (or joining) and loosing (or freeing). The

actions of man may or may not correlate with the actions of God. For example, when people divorce, God has not necessarily loosed the bond. Hence they can be married to one but bound to another (Romans 7:3).

The issue here is more than terminology. Dawson will state that when people divorce, they are not really divorced unless God actually severs the bond. Therefore, if they are not scripturally divorced, they are actually still scripturally married, even though they are no longer civilly married to each other. Dawson would thus agree that if a couple gets a civil divorce unscripturally, neither would have the divine right to remarry. However, Dawson will claim that if one of the parties eventually civilly remarries someone else, thus committing adultery, the other party now has the right to a scriptural divorce, since they were actually scripturally married all along (pg 279, pr 9). This is essentially the "mental divorce" false doctrine gaining acceptance in the church today. It's called "mental divorce" because the one who would now supposedly thus have a right to a scriptural divorce cannot execute it civilly. The only recourse is to repudiate that former relationship in the mind and remarry another scripturally and civilly.

This is wrong. The source of this error is misunderstanding what exactly is a divorce and what exactly is a marriage. When people are married, they really are married; when they divorce, they really are divorced. This distinction between a civil and a scriptural divorce or marriage is foreign to scripture. Moreover, when Jesus speaks of divorce in Matthew 5 and 19, the word is generic and simply means "put away" or "send away," and many reliable translations use such a phrase instead of "divorce." Jesus is not merely saying not to file a civil divorce; he is saying not to separate. Whether or not one executes legal action is beside the point. It is obviously this physical separation, defrauding each other, that leads to fornication, just as Jesus and Paul both said it would. The legal document is not what leads one to commit fornication.

Another variant of this doctrine is called "the waiting game." In this version, the unhappy couple separate, that is, they divorce generically without any legal action. The idea is that since they don't get a civil divorce, they don't actually divorce, so they have not violated Jesus' instruction. Now they watch each other and see who can "hold out" the longest and not commit fornication. As soon as one caves in, the other is presumed to have grounds for a civil divorce and remarriage. This, too, is heresy. Dawson doesn't deal with this exact scenario in his Chapter 12 examples, but his reasoning is consistent with this false doctrine.

The absurdity of this is that when couples separate generically or divorce civilly without the knowledge of fornication, they have already done what Jesus told them not to do: "put away." The only way that one can remarry is if the reason they separated in the first place, with or without legal action, is because one is known to have committed fornication. Fornication has to be the cause for the separation (Matthew 5:32). "Cause" is from LOGOS and denotes the reason, account, and ground for a thing (Thayer). We should not think we can play God for the fool in this matter. We cannot separate (generic divorce) for some other cause, then when fornication occurs, divorce (civilly). This does not fit the divine pattern, which is fornication first, then separation. In the doctrines under consideration, the separation is first, then the fornication. No one can claim rights to God's laws while violating them.

VIII. "Unscriptural Divorce and Remarriage: A Variety of Answers" [177]

From this point in his book, Dawson proceeds to analyze and critique what others say on the subject. In all frankness and due respect, he is in no position to make such assessments. In his reasoning, Dawson is distorting word definitions, confusing generic and specific terminology, proceeding upon assumptions and suppositions, and creating contradictions. In later chapters, he discusses various divorce examples. Beginning with a false understanding, he unavoidably ends up with false conclusions. We have already examined one of these, but we will go no further. Noting the error of his premise is sufficient in this review.

Concluding Remarks of the Review

This brings to an end our review of Samuel Dawson's book. Ironically, the very ones who plead for open-mindedness and reliance on God's word alone are sometimes the very ones closing their minds and stepping out on human reasoning and supposition. However, no attempt is made here to malign motives (pg 7). We will not assume to know why Dawson has reached these conclusions after 25 years of study. However, this writer warns the reader. Experience has shown that novel views of divorce are usually the product of difficult situations among family members and close friends rather than careful, unbiased study. The reader is urged not to simply accept what Dawson says on the basis that his doctrine is novel or favorable or that it is based on many years of study and with many scripture references. Dawson receives accolades as being a great healer, but the major portion of the teaching in his book is hereby shown to be in direct opposition to the word of God and will lead men into sin. After directly examining for yourself, choose that which is shown to be "proper for sound doctrine" and abide therein (Titus 2:1).