

## EXPOSING THE PAULINE PRIVILEGE

Divorce rates in our country and in the Lord's church have sky rocketed to astronomical numbers in the last 50 years. Some recent studies reveal that 1 out every 2 marriages end in divorce. Because of the high divorce rate today, some brethren are seeking new and creative ways to divorce and remarry while still remaining right in the sight of God. In such an unstable marital climate, Christians must understand that the Word of God teaches a person can only remarry if their spouse commits fornication or they die (Matt. 19:9; Rom. 7:1-4). One of the more creative reasons for divorce and remarriage is known as the Pauline Privilege. This doctrine affirms that Paul gave additional information on divorce and remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15. Advocates of this position claim Paul allows a Christian to remarry if their non-Christian mate abandons them. It is the purpose of this tract to clearly show from Scripture that Paul does not give another reason for divorce, but rather he holds up God's original design for marriage from Genesis 2. The Pauline Privilege is not necessarily a new doctrine in the church today. The Pauline Privilege can be traced back to Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407). It even became part of the Roman Catholic Canon Law. Let us now turn our attention to what the Scriptures say on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Before we think about divorce and remarriage, we need to look closely at God's purpose and design for marriage. Marriage was created by God:

1. To provide needed companionship for man and woman (Gen. 2:18-20). 2. For reproduction purposes (Gen. 1:28, 9:1; 1 Tim. 5:4). 3. To prevent fornication (1 Cor. 7:2-5; Prov. 5:18-21). God has always intended for marriage to be permanent (Mat. 19:6; Rom. 7:1-4; Mal. 2:16). The man is to be the head of the household and both man and women should show great love for one another (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:25-29; 1 Pet. 3:27). Marriage is honorable in the sight of all and the sexual relationship is holy (Heb. 13:4). From these passages we can learn that marriage is something we should take very seriously and embrace as a gift from God. With a proper understanding of the purpose of marriage in mind, let's examine Jesus' response to a question about marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

**In Matthew 19:3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"** <sup>4</sup>

**And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' <sup>5</sup> "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'? <sup>6</sup> "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." <sup>7</sup> They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> "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." (See also Mk. 10:2-12).**

In this context, the Pharisees are once again trying to trap Jesus. They simply want to know if they can divorce their wife for any reason. Judging from our high divorce rate today, it would seem that the world would answer this question with a "yes", but Jesus does not. He basically tells them no, because what God has joined together let not man separate. They immediately ask him why Moses allowed it and Jesus tells them this was only permitted because of the hardness in their hearts. But notice the last part of verse 8. Jesus informs them that from the beginning of time it was never God's intention for man to divorce his wife. This teaches us that God has a universal law when it comes to marriage and divorce which applies to all people. This is important for us to comprehend because some try to twist verse 9 into saying that it only applies to Christians, thus the non-Christian is not affected by Jesus' Words. However, verse 9 makes itself clear that it encompasses every single person. Notice it says "whoever divorces". The word "whoever" means every single person Christian or non-Christian. Please note the following example. **Mat. 5:21... "whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment."**

Clearly we can see the word "whoever" applies to everyone. To further illustrate this point, take a look at the following companion passage of Mat. 19:9. **Matthew 5:32 "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.**

It should be easy to see that Jesus is stating that whoever (every single person) divorces his wife for any reason except for sexual immorality/fornication causes her to commit adultery and whoever (every single person) marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. Another point that needs to be made here is from the word "except". When Jesus used this word it automatically eliminates all other reasons for getting divorced and being able to remarry. Please understand that only sexual immorality/fornication can constitute a biblical divorce where the innocent party can remarry without living in adultery. Let's examine another passage that clearly shows the exclusive nature of this word "except". **John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**

It is easy for us to see that the only way to the father is through Jesus. If we can see the exclusiveness of this passage then we should be able to see it in Mat. 5:32, 19:9. When Jesus tells us the only exception that will allow someone who is divorced to remarry scripturally is sexual immorality/fornication, then we need to accept that no other way exists. This is extremely important for us to understand because whatever interpretation is applied to 1 Cor. 7:15 it CANNOT add another reason for a scriptural remarriage after a divorce or it will contradict what Jesus said in Mat. 5:32, 19:9. I don't know of any serious Christians that would ever try to add another way to the father in John 14:6 so what makes some Christians think they have the right to add another way for remarriage in Mat. 5:32, 19:9? This within itself shows that 1 Cor. 7:15 should not be interpreted as an additional way to scripturally remarry after one is divorced.

Before we specifically examine 1 Cor. 7:15 I want to point out a few more things. There are some that would argue that Jesus was only reinterpreting Moses' Law and that Mat. 5:32, 19:9 doesn't apply to Christians today. However, there is a major problem with this view because under Moses' Law an adulterer was put to death. **Deuteronomy 22:22 " If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die -- the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel. (See also Lev. 20:10; John 8:4-5).**

Whatever law Jesus was talking about certainly did not belong to Moses' Law because He

simply calls for the adulterer to be put away and not killed. Therefore, Jesus was teaching something that applies to everyone today and He was not simply reinterpreting Moses' Law.

Some also like to say that Mat. 5:32, 19:9 doesn't apply to non-Christians. Notice the following example. Let's say a person gets divorced and remarried 10 times for some other reason besides sexual immorality/fornication. Now if Mat. 5:32, 19:9 doesn't apply until someone becomes a Christian then this would mean the person from our example could remain married to their tenth mate when they become a Christian. Then once they become a Christian they would be held accountable to Mat. 5:32, 19:9 from that point forward. In other words, they would never have to repent of their adulterous marriage they were in. This view has some major problems. I have already shown that "whoever" in Mat. 5:32, 19:9 includes both Christian and non-Christian. This view also implies that it would be impossible for a non-Christian to be held accountable for adultery or fornication. However, the Word of God emphatically states there are sexual immoral people of the world (1 Cor. 5:9-10) and that non-Christians were guilty of adultery among many other sins before they became Christians (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Another great example to show the universal law of divorce and remarriage can be found in the following verses: **Mark 6:17 For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. <sup>18</sup> For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."**

What law is John talking about? It can't be the Law of Moses because Herod was a Gentile and thus Moses' Law would not apply to him. The only reasonable explanation is that his actions violated God's universal law of marriage that started with Adam and Eve as expressed by Jesus in Mat. 19:8. Both Christians and non-Christians have the same set of rules. To say otherwise would mean that God is showing partiality to the non-Christian (Rom. 2:11). Now let's turn our attention to the following verses: **1 Corinthians 7:10 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> But to the rest**

**I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?**

In this chapter the Corinthians had many questions in regards to marriage and Paul answers these questions. Please keep in mind that these verses are the only place that the supposed Pauline Privilege comes from. Now we could examine if verse 10 is talking about married Christians or all married people. We could even talk about the different Greek words used for divorce and departing in these verses. However, this really isn't necessary. Instead, I want to keep this very simple and make some logical points. First of all, the major theme of these verses is to remain married to your mate if at all possible. There are two things you do not see discussed in the verses, sexual immorality or remarriage. Verse 10 – 11 teaches us that a wife is not to leave her husband. If she does, she is to remain unmarried or she can go back to her husband and be with him. This same rule applies to the husband. In verse 12 – 13 Paul specifically deals with a Christian being married to a non-Christian. Once again, we see a similar response. A Christian, whether male or female, is to stay in the marriage and not divorce. As he states in verse 16, we might end up leading our spouse to Christ.

We have learned that neither sexual immorality/fornication nor remarriage is under discussion in these verses. Yet those who advocate the Pauline Privilege try to say that it is there. Now let's examine the one specific verse where this view comes from. **1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.**

The whole misconception of this verse comes from the misunderstanding of the phrase "under

bondage". Before we look at this word from the Greek, I would like to make some practical points.

1. Where does this verse say anything about remarriage? It only states that if the unbeliever wants to leave then let them leave.
2. I have already shown from Mat. 5:32, 19:9 that there cannot be another exception for a divorced person to remarry other than sexual immorality/fornication.
3. Why would Paul make it acceptable for a Christian to remarry after a non-Christian departs yet in verse 10-11 he forbids the married couple from divorcing or from remarrying? He wouldn't because that would show partiality.
4. Why would Paul make it acceptable for a Christian to remarry after a non-Christian departs, yet Jesus says whoever (Christian or non-Christian) divorces his wife and marries another except for sexual immorality/fornication commits adultery? He wouldn't because this would contradict Jesus' teaching.

These four points illustrate that "under bondage" cannot possibly be referring to the marriage bond or stating that one is free to remarry under this circumstance. To really drive this point home we need examine the phrase "under bondage" from the Greek. The Greek word used here is "doulou" and means "to make a slave of". This word can only be found in eight different verses. For instance, it is used to describe being a slave to wine (Titus 2:3), the world (Gal. 4:3), and to righteousness (Rom. 6:18). Please take note that this word is never used to describe the marriage bond nor should it because marriage is not slavery. The word used for a marriage bond is the Greek word "deo" which can be seen in (1 Cor. 7:27, 39; Rom. 7:2). So, the question becomes if Paul was wanting people to understand that he had the marriage bond in mind in 1 Cor. 7:15, then why did he use a Greek word that was never used to describe the marriage bond? Doesn't it make sense that he used this word "doulou" so that people would understand that he had something else in mind instead of the marriage bond?

To further illustrate this point we need to examine the Greek tense of the phrase "under bondage" which is "verb indicative perfect passive 3rd person singular". The perfect tense form of this word means that its present state resulted from a past action. In other words, grammatically we can say that the person was not under bondage in the past nor are they under

bondage in their current state. So you see if "under bondage" is referring to the marriage bond then Paul is stating that these Christians were not under the marriage bond in the past and are not under the marriage bond right now. If this is the case then why did Paul tell these same people not to divorce their non-Christian mates if they will stay with them in verse 12-13? If they were never bound to the marriage then why on earth would Paul ask them to keep it? It should be easy for us to see that "under bondage" cannot possibly be talking about the marriage bond.

So, what does "not under bondage" mean? The best explanation that fits what Paul is teaching here is that a person is not a slave to their marriage. If a non-Christian decides to leave we should not try to force them to stay nor should we compromise our faithfulness to God in order to save the marriage. No matter how a person decides to interpret what "not under bondage" means, hopefully you have learned from this paper that it cannot possibly refer to the marriage bond. This also means there is no way for a person to find the Pauline Privilege in 1 Cor. 7:15. Let God's Word be your guide.

**If you have questions or comments send them to [lgchurchofchrist@cablone.net](mailto:lgchurchofchrist@cablone.net).**

# Exposing the Pauline Privilege

"Although Jesus said the only reason for divorce was fornication, I think I'll write to the Christians at Corinth and give them the Pauline Privilege."



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