

THE PAULINE PRIVILEGE

A Brief Examination and Refutation of the Pauline Privilege Doctrine

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*Brown Trail School of Preaching Alumni Lectures
January 2017*

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TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:10-15

OBJECTIVES: (1) Provide a description of the Pauline Privilege Doctrine & (2) Provide a biblical refutation of such doctrine.

INTRODUCTION:

1. "Twisted Scriptures" was a reality in the past, and continues to be the case in the present (2 Peter 3:16-17).
2. The teachings of God on marriage have been under attack since the beginning of time!
3. My responsibility as a gospel preacher (1 Peter 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:1; 2 Timothy 1:13; 1 Timothy 4:16).
4. Your responsibility as a listener (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1).
5. Today we are still living in difficult times where sound teaching is being attacked by those who have no respect whatsoever about the Word of God.
6. As Christians we have the obligation to handle aright the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).
7. **A Brief overview of the context of 1 Corinthians 7:**
 - a. Paul answers a few questions regarding marriage which the Corinthian brethren had asked him about (7:1).
 - b. He also deals with some instructions about marriage.
 - c. Paul provides several principles relating to a marriage of Christians to Christians (10-11).
 - d. Paul also provides instructions to a marriage of Christians to non-Christians (12-15).
 - e. Paul also provides instructions for those who are not married, as well as to those who have lost their spouse (1, 8, 32-35; 39-40).
8. In this lesson we will examine the following points:
 - a. A brief summary of the teaching of marriage, divorce and remarriage.
 - b. A summary of the so called, "Pauline Privilege"
 - c. A brief refutation of the so called, "Pauline Privilege"
 - d. The true meaning of "Not under bondage."
9. Please, allow the lesson to sink into your ears (Luke 9:44).
10. I do not expect everyone to understand this subject when it is presented in just one lesson. I would encourage you to please take the time to examine carefully the particular teaching we are about to discuss.

11. Let us consider the following information in order to establish the fact that the apostle Paul did not muddy the waters of marriage by teaching a doctrine contrary to what Jesus taught.

I. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF GOD'S TEACHING ON MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

1. According to the teaching of the Bible, the only ones who are permitted to marry or remarry are...
 - a. # 1. Those who have never been married before and who will marry someone who is eligible for marriage (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:1-6).
 - b. # 2. Those who have gone through a divorce due to fornication being the only cause. In such cases, only the innocent spouse can marry again (Matthew 19:9). This is not the case for the guilty mate.
 - c. # 3. Those who have lost their spouse due to death are able to enter into another marriage (Romans 7).
2. These three points have been the absolute and objective truth with regards to marriage, divorce and remarriage as given by God through His inspired Word.
3. It is imperative that we keep this in mind as we study any matter that deals with marriage, divorce and remarriage.
4. Now, let us examine the so called "Pauline Privilege."

II. A HISTORY AND SUMMARY OF THE SO CALLED "PAULINE PRIVILEGE"

1. What do people mean by the so called "Pauline Privilege"?
 - A. In essence, it is an erroneous interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:15 where some teach that the apostle Paul provided another cause by which people can divorce and remarry with God's approval, that is, *another cause* besides the "only one" the Lord provided in Matthew 19:9.
 - B. **The Pauline Privilege** also advocates the false doctrine that the teachings of the Bible on marriage, divorce and remarriage only apply to Christians, and not to non-Christians. What Jesus taught on Matthew 19:1-9, only applies to Christians, since it is a "covenant passage".
 - C. **The Pauline Privilege** doctrine also reads into the text what is not there. Paul is not talking about divorce in this passage under consideration, but the desertion of the unbeliever.
 1. In fact, the Greek word "**apoluo**" which means divorce, is not even found in 1 Corinthians 7, but is found all over the place in Matthew 5:32-33 and Matthew 19:1-9.
 - D. **The Pauline Privilege** doctrine attacks inspiration by showing that Paul contradicts himself in the same context of the passage under consideration (1 Cor. 7:11, 15).

1. In verse 11, he instructs to remain unmarried, but in verse 15, he allows the unbeliever to depart and remarry.
- E. **The Pauline Privilege** teaches that a non-Christian who divorces his spouse can divorce and remarry as many times as he wishes, and such with God's approval.
 1. They argue that the Christian cannot get a divorce, and if it does, then such Christian must remain unmarried, but the non-Christian can do it without any problems whatsoever.
- F. This doctrine was first advocated by John Chrysostom, an archbishop of Constantinople around 347-407 A.D. He was known as the "Doctor of the Church" (i.e., the Catholic Church).
- G. This doctrine is also part of the Roman Catholic Canon law.
- H. The Pauline Privilege was also defended by the Reformer, Martin Luther.
- I. This doctrine has been taught by several preachers such as James D. Bales, Neil Lightfoot, James Burton Coffman, and others.
2. Let us now turn our attention to a brief refutation of the Pauline Privilege.

III. A BRIEF REFUTATION OF THE PAULINE PRIVILEGE

1. The doctrine of the Pauline Privilege is false for the following reasons:
 - A. # 1. **It stands contrary to the doctrine of Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage as taught by our Lord in Matthew 5:32 & 19:1-9, cf. Genesis 2.**
 1. The doctrine of the Pauline Privilege teaches that there is another ground or cause for divorce, besides fornication.
 2. This second cause is called, "The desertion of the unbeliever" or the "Pauline Privilege."
 3. Jesus used the word, "**except**" which makes it clear that **there is only one cause** for a divorce to be acceptable by God. This cause is fornication.
 4. Jesus used the word "**except**" in John 3:5 to refer to the only way to enter into the kingdom. If it is the case that the word "except" does not mean what it means, then it is the case that there is another way to enter into the kingdom of God. Such conclusion stands contrary to the Word of God. This erroneous conclusion is held by the denominational world!
 - B. # 2. **The Pauline Privilege stands contrary to the word "whoever" used by Jesus Christ in Matthew 19:9.**
 1. Some brethren teach that Matthew 19:9 is a covenant passage, that is, it only applies to Christians who have obeyed the gospel.

2. The Pauline Privilege argues that the teachings of Christ on MDR only apply to Christians.
3. The laws of Christ on MDR apply also to non-Christians. This is proven by the teaching of Matthew 14 and Mark 6, where John the Baptizer applied such laws to Herod ("It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife," cf. Matthew 14:4; Mark 6:18).
4. If it is the case that the laws of Christ on MDR do not apply to non-Christians, then it is the case that such people are free to do whatever they want in the context of marriage. They can marry and divorce as many times as they want to without being in conflict with God's teaching. After all, the teachings of MDR do not apply to them. This, brethren, is absurd!
5. The teaching of 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 is in perfect harmony with the universal teaching of Jesus on MDR!

C. # 3. The Pauline Privilege is refuted by the Greek words used in the context of 1 Corinthians 7.

1. The study of the Greek New Testament can help us to refute the error that is presented from time to time.
2. In 1 Corinthians 7:15, Paul uses the phrase, "**Not under bondage**." Some have suggested that the verb "**bondage**" refers to the marriage bond between a man and a woman.
 1. This suggestion is based on the usage of the word "bond" in 1 Corinthians 7:27; 7:39; Romans 7:2). The word bond appears in these three passages and is used to refer to the marriage bond.
 2. The Greek verb here is **dedesai** for 1 Cor. 7:27; **dedetai** for 1 Cor. 7:39 and **dedetai** for Rom. 7:2).
 3. Nevertheless, in 1 Corinthians 7:15, the Greek verb for bondage is **dedoúlotai**, which does not mean the marriage bond, that is, as it is used in the New Testament (cf. Acts 7:6; Romans 6:18, 22; 1 Corinthians 9:19; Galatians 4:3; Titus 2:3; 2 Peter 2:19).
 4. The verb "**bondage**" in 1 Corinthians 7:15 means slavery, "the lowest term in the scale of servitude" (Roy Deaver).
 5. Lexicographers, Louw & Nida show this word to mean: To be firmly bound by an obligation, to be bound, to be under obligation, to enslave.¹

D. # 4. The Pauline Privilege is refuted by the Greek tense of the verb "bondage"

¹ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 474. Print.

1. If it is the case that the word “bondage” refers to marriage, then we have a problem with the tense of such word.
2. The verb “**bondage**” is found in the perfect tense, which denotes a present state resulting from past action, and its force here is “was not bound and is not bound.”
3. Wayne Jackson makes the following comment with regards to this point, “The sense of the verse then is: ‘Yet if (assuming such should occur) the unbeliever separates himself, let him separate himself: the brother or sister was not (before the departure) and is not (now that the departure has occurred) enslaved...” Whatever the ‘bondage’ is, therefore, the Christian was not in it, even before the alien left. But the saint was married (and is) to him; hence, the bondage is not the marriage! He also went on to say, “Let the reader substitute the word “marriage” for “bondage,” giving the full force to the perfect tense (i.e., “has not been married and is not married”) and the fallacy of viewing the bondage as marriage will be readily apparent.”²
4. Taking into consideration the meaning of the tense, the literal reading of the text would be, “Let him depart; a brother or sister is not under bondage, was not under bondage, and never has been under bondage in such cases.”

E. Implication if the “Pauline Privilege” were to be true:

1. “If there is a “Pauline privilege” for Christians married to non-Christians, it does not apply in marriages where both parties are Christians. In view of this fact we would be forced to conclude it is far better for a Christian to marry a non-believer because there is another possible reason for a latter marriage! Such a view is unthinkable for a Christian, but it is the logical consequence of the Pauline Privilege doctrine.”³

THE TRUE MEANING OF THE PHRASE “NOT UNDER BONDAGE”

1. What, then, is the meaning of the phrase “not under bondage”?

- a. It simply means that the Christian is not enslaved to the non-Christian to the extent that the Christian is to forsake his faithfulness to the Lord.
- b. *Roy Lanier, Sr.*, made the following observation, “He simply means that the believer is not so bound to the unbeliever that he must give up Christ to hold the unbeliever.”

² Wayne Jackson & Truman Scott, *Divorce & Remarriage: A Study Discussion* (Stockton, CA: Courier Publications, 1982), p. 88-89.

³ Brad, Price, “Commentary on First Corinthians” (Copyright, January 1, 2010, www.abiblecommentary.com)

- c. *Harvey Floyd* said, "Paul uses **dedoulotai** in 1 Corinthians 7:15 because he wishes to say that for a Christian to yield to pressure to give up his Christianity to preserve his marriage would mean slavery of the most abject kind. The Christian must never consider himself in such bondage."
- d. The Christian does not have to be in a situation where he or she has to choose between the Lord and his or her spouse. We are to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

CONCLUSION:

1. In conclusion, you and I can reply with great confidence that the apostle Paul did not muddy the marriage waters by his teaching on first Corinthians 7.
2. His teaching in the passage under consideration is in perfect harmony with the teaching of Jesus Christ on marriage, divorce and remarriage.
3. Let me encourage you to do a further study of this subject in order to be prepared to teach it to others.

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