

is John discussing when he refers to something being “unlawful”? It cannot be the Law of Moses because Herod was a Gentile, and thus Moses’ Law would not have applied to him. The only reasonable explanation is that his actions violated God’s universal law of marriage that began with Adam and Eve (and that expressed by Jesus in Matthew 19:8). Both Christians and non-Christians have the same set of rules. To say otherwise would mean that God is guilty of showing partiality to the non-Christian (Rom. 2:11).

Now let us turn our attention to 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. 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. 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. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 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. 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. 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?”

The Corinthians apparently had numerous questions regarding marriage. In chapter 7, Paul answers these questions. Keep in mind that these are the only verses from which the alleged Pauline Privilege is supposed to be derived. We could examine whether or not verse 10 is talking about married Christians, or *all* married people. We could talk about the different Greek words used in these verses for “divorce” and “departing.” However, those things will not be necessary. Instead, let us simply make the following points. The major theme of these verses is that Christians must remain married to their non-Christian mates if at all possible. There are two

things that are *not* discussed in these verses: sexual immorality and remarriage. Verses 10-11 teach that a wife is not to leave her husband. If she does, she is to remain unmarried, or she can return to her husband and be with him once more. This same rule applies to the husband. In verses 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 Paul notes in verse 16, such a Christian might even end up leading his or her spouse to Christ.

Neither fornication nor remarriage is under discussion in these verses. Yet those who advocate the Pauline Privilege suggest that they are under discussion because of Paul’s comments in 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 problem arises from a misunderstanding of the phrase “under bondage.” Before we look at this phrase in the Greek, we would like to make some practical observations.

1. Where does 1 Corinthians 7:15 say anything about *remarriage*? It merely states that if the unbeliever wants to leave, they are to be allowed to leave.
2. We have already shown (from Mathew 5:32 and 19:9) that there cannot be “another reason” for a divorced person to remarry (other than fornication).
3. Why would Paul make it acceptable for a Christian to remarry after a non-Christian departs, yet in verses 10-11 he forbids the married couple from divorcing and remarrying? He would not do that because it would show partiality.
4. Why would Paul make it acceptable for a Christian to remarry after a non-Christian departs, when Jesus specifically stated that *whoever* (Christian or non-Christian) divorces his wife and marries another (except for fornication) commits adultery? He would not, because this would contradict Jesus’ teaching.

These four points illustrate that the phrase “under bondage” cannot possibly be referring to the marriage bond. Nor does the phrase “under bondage” suggest that one is free to remarry under this particular set of circum-

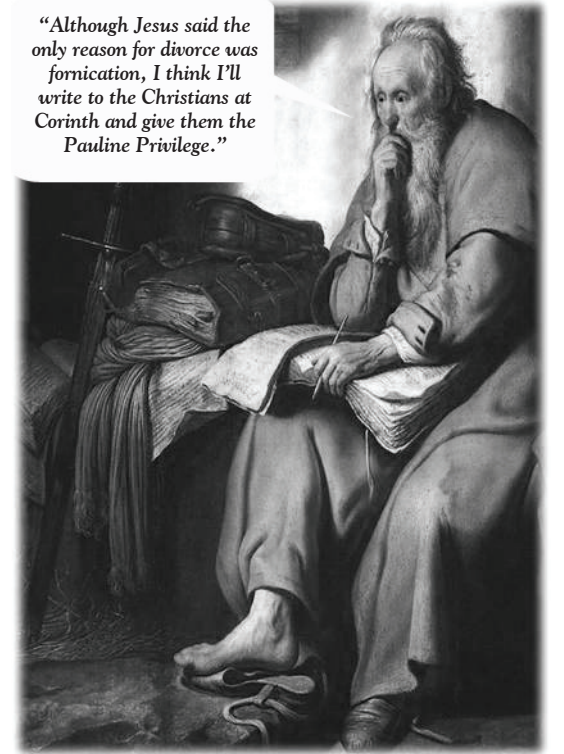
stances. The Greek word used here, *doulos*, means “to make a slave of.” This word is found in only eight different verses in the New Testament. For instance, it is used to describe being a slave to wine (Tit. 2:3), the world (Gal. 4:3), and to righteousness (Rom. 6:18). Please note that *this word is never used to describe the marriage bond* (nor should it, since marriage is not slavery). The word used for a marriage bond is the Greek word *deo*, which can be seen in 1 Corinthians 7:27,39 and Romans 7:2. Thus, the question is this: If Paul wanted people to understand that he had the marriage bond in mind in 1 Corinthians 7:15, then why did he use a Greek word that was never used to describe the marriage bond? Doesn’t it make more sense to suggest that he used the word *doulos* 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 third person singular.” The perfect tense form of this word means that its present state resulted from a past action. In other words, speaking grammatically we can say that the person was not under bondage in the past, nor are they under bondage in their current state. If “under bondage” refers 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 as he writes to them. If this is the case, then why did Paul tell these same people not to divorce their non-Christian mates (vss. 12-13) but to remain with them? If they were never bound to the marriage, then why would Paul ask them to stay in the “marriage”? Obviously, when Paul speaks of “under bondage,” he cannot possibly be talking about the marriage bond.

What *does* “not under bondage” mean? The best explanation that fits with what Paul is teaching here is that a person is not a slave to their marriage. If a non-Christian decides to leave, the Christian should not try to force the non-Christian to stay. At the same, however, the Christian mate should not compromise his or her faithfulness to God in order to save the marriage. Whatever else “not under bondage” might mean, it cannot possibly refer to the marriage bond. This, then, means that there is no way for a person to find the Pauline Privilege in 1 Corinthians 7:15. Let God’s Word be your guide, and you cannot go wrong.

“The Pauline Privilege”

Cougan Collins and Ben Bailey

“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.”



Divorce rates in our country, and even in the Lord's church, have sky rocketed in the last fifty years. Recent statistics reveal that roughly 70% of all marriages end in divorce. Because of the high divorce rate today, some Christians are seeking creative ways to divorce and remarry while still trying to remain right in the sight of God. In such an unstable marital climate, Christians must understand that the Word of God teaches that a person can remarry only if their spouse dies or commits fornication (Rom. 7:1-4; Mt. 19:9). One of the more creative reasons for divorce and remarriage is what is known as "the Pauline Privilege." This doctrine affirms that Paul gave *additional information* on divorce and remarriage (in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15)—information that the Lord Himself did not give while here on Earth. Advocates of this position claim that Paul allows a Christian to remarry if his or her non-Christian mate abandons them (i.e., no fornication occurred). It is the purpose of this tract to show from Scripture that Paul does not give "another reason" for divorce, but instead upholds God's original design for marriage going all the way back to Genesis 2. The Pauline Privilege is not necessarily a new doctrine in the church today. It can be traced back to Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407), and 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.

As we begin, let us look closely at God's purpose and design for marriage. Marriage was created by God:

- To provide needed companionship for man and woman (Gen. 2:18-20)
- For procreation (Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 1 Tim. 5:4)
- To prevent fornication (1 Cor. 7:2-5; Prov. 5:18-21)

God has *always* intended for marriage to be *permanent* (Mt. 19:6; Rom. 7:1-4; Mal. 2:16). The man is to be the head of the household, and both man and women are to 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 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 us examine Jesus' response to a question about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In Matthew 19:3 we read:

"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?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, 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"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' 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. 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 entrap Jesus. They want to know if they can divorce their wife for any reason. Judging from our high divorce rate today, it would seem that many in the world would answer this question with a resounding "Yes." But Jesus does not. He basically tells the Pharisees, "No, because what God has joined together, let not man separate." They immediately ask Jesus why Moses allowed it, and Jesus tells them that Moses permitted it only because of the hardness of 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 divorce to occur. This teaches us that God has a universal law when it comes to marriage and divorce—a law that applies to all people everywhere. This is important for us to understand because some have suggested that Matthew 19:9 applies only to Christians, thereby causing non-Christians to be completely unaffected by Jesus' teaching. However, verse 9 makes itself clear that Jesus' teaching *encompass everyone*. Notice that verse 9 says "*whoever* divorces." The word "*whoever*" means every single person—Christian or non-Christian. Consider the following parallel in Matthew 5:21—"Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." Clearly

we can see that the word "*whoever*" applies to everyone. To further illustrate this point, examine the companion passage of Matthew 19:9—Matthew 5:32—where Jesus said, "But I say to you that *whoever* divorces his wife for any reason except for fornication 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* (i.e., every single person) divorces his wife for any reason *except* for 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 has to do with the word "except." When Jesus used this word, it automatically eliminated all other reasons for getting divorced and being able to remarry. Only fornication constitutes a biblically acceptable reason for divorce (and a divorce in which the innocent party can remarry without living in adultery). Let us examine another passage that clearly shows the exclusive nature of this word "except." In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father *except* through Me."

This makes it clear that the *only* way to the Father is through Jesus. If we can understand the exclusivity of this passage, then we also should be able to understand the exclusivity of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. When Jesus tells us that the *only* exception to God's law that will permit someone who is divorced to remarry scripturally is fornication, then we need to accept that no other way exists. This is critically important. *Whatever interpretation is applied to 1 Corinthians 7:15 cannot add another reason for a scriptural remarriage after a divorce or it will contradict what Jesus said in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.* We cannot imagine any dedicated Christian who would try to add "another way" to the Father (other than the one Jesus presented in John 14:6). Why, then, do some Christians think that they have the right to add "another way" for remarriage to such passages as Matthew 5:32 and 19:9? This within itself shows that 1 Corinthians 7:15 should not be interpreted as providing "another way" to scripturally remarry after someone is divorced.

Before we examine 1 Corinthians 7:15, we would like to consider some additional issues. There are some who argue that Jesus was merely "reinterpreting" Moses' Law, and that Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 do not apply

to Christians today. However, there is a significant problem with this view because under Moses' Law an adulterer was to be put to death. Moses wrote in 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 and Jn. 8:4-5). Whatever law Jesus was discussing, one thing is for certain: He could *not* have been discussing Moses' Law because He simply called for the adulterer to be put away, not killed. Therefore, Jesus was teaching something that applies to everyone, and was not simply "reinterpreting" Moses' Law.

Some also have suggested that Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 *do not apply to non-Christians*. Notice the following example. Suppose a person who is a non-Christian gets divorced and remarried ten times for some reason other than fornication. If Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 do not apply until someone becomes a Christian, then this would mean that such a person could remain married to the tenth mate when they become a Christian. However, once they become a Christian, they then will be held accountable to Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 from that point forward. In other words, they would never have to repent of the adulterous marriage in which they were living when they became a Christian. Such a view has serious problems. We have already shown that "whoever" in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 includes *both* Christians *and* non-Christians. But the view that Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 do not apply to non-Christians 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* sexually immoral people in 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 good illustration of the universal nature of God's laws regarding divorce and remarriage can be found in Mark 6:17. The text of that passage reads as follows: "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. For John had said to Herod, 'It is *not lawful* for you to have your brother's wife.'" What law