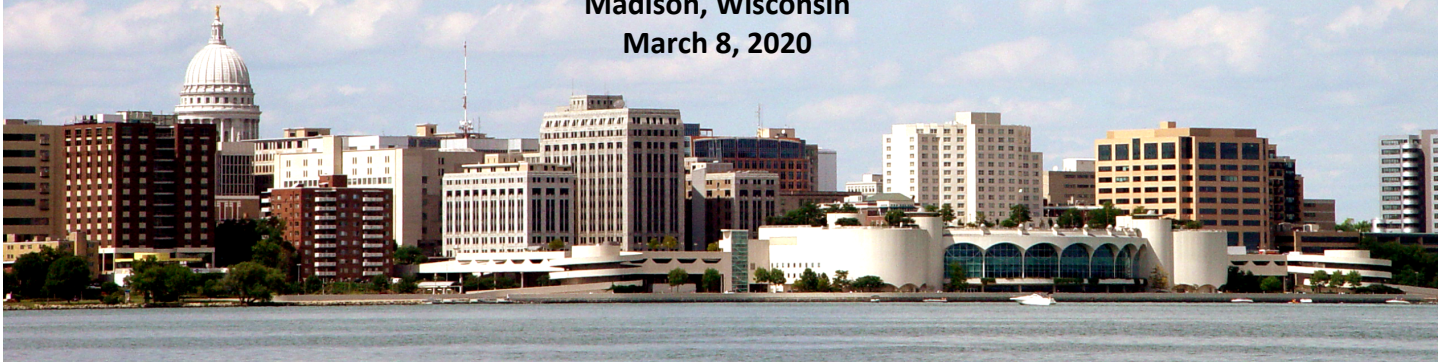


Does 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 Allow an Additional Pauline Privilege for Divorce and Remarriage?

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This morning we are continuing in our brief series of lessons from 1 Corinthians 7, and as I explained very briefly last week, we are in this chapter because of the assignment given to me for the Minnesota Bible Lectures that'll be held on April 25 this year, up in Owatonna, Minnesota. The theme for the lectures this year is "Righteousness in Remarriage." And to be honest, I was not thrilled about the assignment. There are so many other topics and texts we could have covered, and yet I do understand the importance of the study. They have some good studies scheduled. Some of you might appreciate the last one, "Are Christ's Teachings on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Binding in the New Covenant, or Are They Merely Commentary on the Old Law (MMLJ/BC)?" Some of you might realize that we lost around 25 members over this exact issue back in 2007. It's the idea that the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, only apply "before the cross" and are not binding on us today. People do this to put what Jesus said on marriage in Matthew 19 in the Old Testament. It is a rather bizarre understanding of the Bible, and basically suggests that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John only apply to the Jews, and all we have as doctrine today is found from Acts 2 – Revelation. What they fail to realize is that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were actually written several decades AFTER the cross, and they were written for everybody! So, I am looking forward to learning more about this in a few weeks.

But as you can see on the wall up here, this year, I have been assigned the topic, "Is there an additional Pauline Privilege for Divorce and Remarriage (1 Corinthians 7)?" And when they first got in touch, I had to look it up, and I'm glad I did, because what I thought it was, is slightly different from what it actually is. The "Pauline Privilege" is basically a Catholic doctrine that gives another exception to God's plan for a lifelong marriage. In addition to "sexual immorality" (as given by Jesus in Matthew 19:9), they have supposedly found another way out, but only when several very specific conditions are met:

1. Both the husband and wife have not been baptized at the time of their marriage.
2. One of them is baptized into the Catholic Church.
3. The other person refuses to be baptized.
4. The non-Catholic spouse either, 1.) abandons the marriage altogether (by divorce or desertion), or 2.) makes life completely unbearable for the one who has been baptized.

These facts must all be verified by an investigation. And just to clarify, this "privilege" does NOT apply if either were baptized before the marriage, and it does NOT apply if both are baptized at some point during the

marriage. As I understand it, the non-Catholic can sink this by being baptized. So, this particular doctrine has a very specific definition. But if someone meets these criteria, the church might grant the right of remarriage to another Catholic. In doing the research for today's lesson, I actually found the form you need to fill out. if you want to try to claim the "Pauline Privilege" here in Madison. It is a five-page form asking for all kinds of information from both the "petitioner" and the "other party." You fill out the form and submit it to a "tribunal." There are questions about when the couple started dating, the date of the engagement, the date of the marriage, the place of the marriage, who officiated the wedding, children born into the marriage, witnesses to your character, witnesses to the breakdown of the marriage, witnesses who will testify that neither spouse was baptized at the time of the wedding, information concerning the intended spouse and his or her background. On page five, we have a list of necessary documents, we have some fees for this process (of course), and then there is something of an oath with a place for various signatures. By the way, there are zero scripture references on this form. However, in the articles and the definitions that I found elsewhere, most refer to 1 Corinthians 7, and some within the Lord's church have adopted some variation of this doctrine as well.

So, this morning, let us actually open our Bibles as we ask whether Paul's words here give another exception to a life-long marriage. Is this "Pauline Privilege" something we need to believe? I don't plan on going back and restudying what Jesus said in the gospel accounts. We just studied that about a year ago. If you want to learn more, if you want to review that, I've put a few references on the handout and, just briefly, on the wall up here. But to summarize, Jesus teaches that God's intent for marriage (from the beginning) has always been for one man and one woman to be joined together for life. He does give the one exception as **"sexual immorality"** (in Matthew 19:9); only then can the one who is sinned against enter into a new relationship. But our question for today is: Does Paul give a second exception? Does Paul another reason for divorce and remarriage? Does Paul add a loophole to what Jesus teaches?

As we answer the question, let us start by looking at the passage – 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 – and again, like last week, I'm putting some of the major translations on the handout. I've also included my contact information, in case you have any suggestions for improving this lesson before I head up to Minnesota. If this makes no sense whatsoever, I hope you will tell me before I waste my time driving into Viking territory. I hope you will follow along in your own Bible – 1 Corinthians 7:10-16,

¹⁰ But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹ (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

¹² But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵ Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. ¹⁶ 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?

As we look at this passage, I want to divide it into two parts, and as you can see on the handout, we basically have a command from Jesus in verses 10-11, and then we have a command from Paul in verses 12-16.

I. **So, let's start with the command from Jesus, and the command from Jesus (in verses 10-11) is that married people are NOT TO LEAVE each other – and so the command is, DO NOT LEAVE!**

Some people have made a big deal out of how Paul describes this first part as coming from Jesus and the second part as coming from him personally. He says this, though, not to give this first part more weight, because we know that as an inspired apostle, Paul speaks for the Lord. In other words, when Paul writes scripture, he is writing for Jesus. What he means by this, then, is that he is simply repeating something that Jesus has already said. And the message from Jesus on marriage is: Do not leave! Stay together! Again, from the beginning, according to God's plan, marriage has always been intended as a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman.

Now, remember how we don't have the questions, but in this letter we only have the answers. Based on the answer Paul gives here, I'm assuming these people must have been asking something like this, "Hey, Paul, since you seem to be pushing the single life a bit, what about those of us who are already married? Do we need to split up so that we can be spiritual, like you are?" And Paul's answer is basically, "No! But instead, remember what Jesus said: The command from Jesus is that if you are married, you are not to separate."

In other words, what we have here is basically a reminder: Remember what the Lord said! The Lord said that marriage is a lifetime partnership between a man and a woman. ***"What God has joined together, let no one separate,"*** as Jesus said in Matthew 19. And I know, today, we might lament the culture around us, that divorce is so easy. But think for just a moment about Roman culture. Think about the culture in Corinth. As I understand it, divorce back then was pretty much as easy as a woman getting up and leaving. Divorce back then was pretty much as easy as a man saying to his wife, "Get out!" And that is basically what Paul is condemning here. Don't do that! You might notice that he uses two different words here, and neither word (as I understand it) is the common word for divorce. But instead, as we see in some of the major translations, he tells the wives ***"do not leave,"*** and he tells the husbands, ***"do not send her away."***

By the way, this is not just good advice, this is not just a suggestion of some kind, but as most of the translations indicate, this is a ***"command."*** This is a command from Paul, but it is also a command that Jesus gave during his life on this earth. And so, this is a reminder to all married people everywhere, to anyone who will listen to the Lord's command: Do not leave. Do not send your wife away.

And just to make sure we understand this, it seems that Paul clarifies just a bit, because he says, ***"but if she does leave."*** In other words, he admits reality, and the reality is: Sometimes married couples either cannot or will not stay together. And so he addresses this: If a spouse does leave, we have only two choices: 1.) We can ***"remain unmarried,"*** or, 2.) We can ***"be reconciled."*** And this agrees with what Jesus says back in Matthew 19: The only way to enter a new relationship with the Lord's approval is to be the one who is sinned against by spouse who commits sexual sin. This sin isn't mentioned here in 1 Corinthians 7, so in the absence of a scriptural divorce, the options are, 1.) ***"remain unmarried,"*** or, 2.) ***"be reconciled."*** So, stay single or get back together at some point. Paul, then, is not really talking about divorce here, is he? Today, we might refer to this as something of a temporary separation. And in light of what we talked about last week, this is a last ditch, desperate move, because husbands and wives have needs that only they can fulfill. They have an obligation to please each other.

Now, if one spouse leaves and ignores this teaching, if one spouse goes off and enters a new sexual relationship (perhaps even a new marriage) while ignoring both Paul and Jesus, my understanding is that the remaining spouse then has a right to a scriptural divorce and remarriage (based on Matthew 19:9). But again, that is not

the point of this passage. The point here is that we are not to separate, but if a separation does take place, we have two options: 1.) Stay single, or 2.) Be reconciled.

Before we move on from this first part, I would make just two brief observations: First of all, it seems to me that separation is often overlooked. It's obviously not ideal, but it is allowed. There are provisions for it. We do have some guidelines. Too often, couples I know have gone straight from marriage to divorce, when perhaps a separation might have allowed some time to cool off and maybe even get some help. But, like you, I've known many people to bypass this option altogether. Maybe there's some kind of addiction, or some kind of other terrible behavior, even abuse – my suggestion has been: Get out, get yourself somewhere safe, get help, and work toward reconciliation. So, my first observation is that separation is not ideal, but it is often overlooked as a possibility.

Secondly, I would also observe here that the word ***“reconciliation”*** brings some hope into this discussion. And what I mean is: God does not ask us to do what is truly impossible. As I understand it, this word is used five times in the New Testament. Four of those times it's used with reference to us being ***“reconciled”*** to God through Christ Jesus, and once it's used here. So, I see some hope there! If, after I've been separated from God because of my sin, I can be ***“reconciled”*** to God in some way, then perhaps there is also hope for husbands and wives who find themselves separated. Separation is not good, but it is a symptom of a problem or problems that might actually have a solution. So, use a time of separation not to get comfortable being alone, but use it as a time to try to figure out how to get back together. Use it as a time to get help, to get advice and encouragement, perhaps from a counselor or therapist who at least has a Christian worldview, who might help you work through some things. There's a reason why the traditional wedding vows usually include something about promising to stay together and love each other *“for better or worse, in joy or in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for as long as we both shall live.”* We make a promise like that, because difficult times will come. So, it seems to me that Paul acknowledges reality with the possibility of separation, but he is also somewhat hopeful, with the idea of reconciliation.

So, the word from Jesus (and also from Paul) is that husbands and wives are not to leave or send each other away, but if they do separate, they must, 1.) Stay single, or 2.) Be reconciled. Entering into a new relationship is not allowed here – that is not under consideration; in fact, it is expressly condemned.

II. As we move into the second part of this passage, I want us to notice that we now have some NEW INFORMATION FROM PAUL. **PPT**** He's not contradicting Jesus, he's not editing Jesus in any way, but he's writing about a new situation that Jesus never directly addresses, and if I could summarize verses 12-16, Paul's new information is basically DO NOT LEAVE.**

And I know, this is the same message we had in verses 10-11, but he's now speaking directly to new Christians whose spouses have not yet obeyed the gospel. And in this sense, what Paul says is new. They didn't have this situation back in Matthew 19. And that's why Paul starts out by saying, ***“But to the rest I say, not the Lord....”*** He's not downplaying this in any way, he's not saying that this is just his opinion, but he's explaining that Jesus didn't really directly address their question when he was on the earth 20 or so years previously. So, Paul is now speaking on the Lord's behalf. This is an inspired message from the Lord, but it's new in the sense that Jesus never spoke these words in the flesh. But that's okay, because in John 16:12-15 Jesus promised to send the Spirit to give a more complete revelation, and that's what's happening here. Jesus couldn't cram everything into only 3-½ years; that's why we have Paul! So, as an inspired apostle, Paul applies what Jesus said about marriage to these people who had obeyed the gospel, whose spouses had not yet converted.

And really, it's hard not to feel a tiny bit sorry for the non-Christian spouses! Here they are, living life in Corinth, happily worshiping idols and visiting temple prostitutes, and suddenly their spouse meets Paul and is baptized. This changes everything! Now, the new Christian spouse is meeting with her Christian family every day, she understands that it's a sin to worship idols, she's using some of the family's resources to take food to the corona virus colony, she's visiting and writing letters to prisoners, and the husband is left thinking, "What in the world happened to this woman!" Just as Jesus had promised, Christianity has brought conflict into the family. And the early Christians are asking, "What do we do about this? Home life is getting difficult: Do we stay married? Does this marriage even count as a marriage? Are our children legitimate? What do we do?" And Paul's inspired advice is, **"Do not leave!"** As he basically repeats this command, he makes two observations. He points out two realities in all of this.

And I actually want to start down at the end, because it's the basis of what he says here, and it's also at the heart of the misunderstanding many people have about this passage. In verse 15, Paul explains that you are not to leave, but if the non-Christian spouse leaves, let him leave. And the reason he gives is: You are not (and you have never been) a slave to your spouse. This is where English gets in the way a bit, because in many of our English translations, they have Paul saying that you are **"not under bondage,"** and many people assume that Paul is referring to the "bond of marriage." So, their conclusion is: If your non-Christian spouse leaves, you are no longer bound by marriage, which frees you up to go enter a new relationship. But, there are two reasons why this isn't what's going on here, going back to vocabulary and grammar.

We'll start with vocabulary, because Paul uses a word that's almost always translated as **"slave."** And as I understand it, although this word is found 133 times in the New Testament, it never once describes the marriage relationship. It usually refers either to actual slavery or to being a slave or servant of Jesus. The word is used later in this chapter, in verse 21, where Paul refers to actual slaves. I know this might be a surprise to some of you, but marriage is not slavery! In verse 27, Paul does refer to being **"bound"** to a wife, but it is a completely different word. It refers to being **"tied."** There is a difference to being **"tied"** to somebody in marriage and living a life of **"slavery."** It's the slavery that Paul denies in verse 15. And I appreciate how the ESV handles this, as they have Paul saying that the **"brother or sister is not enslaved"** in such cases. He's not referring to the "marriage bond," but he's saying: If your non-Christian spouse leaves, you are not enslaved to that situation. If they insist on leaving, let them go. So, that's the vocabulary part of this.

The other part of this is tied to the grammar here. And it doesn't come across easily in English, but when he refers to not being enslaved, he uses what is known as a "perfect tense negation." On its own, the perfect tense refers to an action either started or completed in the past that has continuing results. The negative of this indicates that no such action has ever taken place, and therefore has no continuing results. In other words, what Paul is saying here is that the person in this situation has never been and is not currently a slave to his or her spouse. He doesn't say that these people are "no longer enslaved" or that they have been "set free from slavery," or that they have been "set free from the bonds of marriage," but he says that they have not ever been enslaved in this way. Do we see, then, how there's no way he's talking about the "marriage bond"? If he was talking about marriage itself, he'd be saying that the brother or sister here "has never been married and is not currently married?" That makes no sense. Instead, Paul is saying, "As far as it depends on you, do not leave; however, if your non-Christian spouse insists on leaving, let them go, because you are not currently and have never been enslaved in that way." Or to put it another way: You are not obligated to give up your Christian faith in order to stay in a relationship that a non-Christian insists on leaving. He's not dissolving the marriage, but he's explaining that marriage is not slavery.

I just want us to imagine the opposite of this. What if Paul had said, “If your non-Christian spouse insists on leaving, you are obligated to stay together, no matter what”? This is the kind of slavery Paul is talking about. You are not (and have never been) enslaved in this way. So, we’ve looked at the vocabulary and grammar, and Paul is saying, “You are not (and have never been) enslaved to your spouse.”

The second reality, the second observation here, is that by doing everything we can to stay in the relationship, the presence of a Christian has a way of sanctifying the rest of the family. Or, as I’ve put it on the wall up here, “You staying married (and acting like a Christian) is a BLESSING to your unbelieving spouse and children.” Again, we don’t have the questions, but we do have the answer, and based on the answer, I’m assuming that the Christians here are worried: Will I get contaminated in some way, if I stay married? Will my children be okay? And I think some of this probably goes back to the Old Testament. As these people start studying the Hebrew scriptures, they start to see how God condemns marriage outside the faith back then. They could see what happened to the children born into those relationships. I’m imagining a new Christian in Corinth hearing the last few chapters of the book of Ezra, “Oh no! Does that apply to me? Am I doing wrong by staying with this unbeliever?” And so, they are worried.

But, Paul says that a believer sanctifies the whole family, in some sense. The children, in fact (unlike what happened back in the Old Testament), are not unclean, but they are holy. The husband is sanctified as well. This doesn’t mean they are saved (we all need to make our own decision on that), but by having a Christian in the family, they are in something of a “set apart” or “holy” environment. Even with only one Christian in it, that home is different from the world. The children are exposed to at least one holy parent. The spouse eats, sleeps, works, plays, and lives with someone who prays for them. In a sense, holiness in the family has a way of being contagious. It spreads. On the other hand, if you leave your children with the unbelieving spouse, they will definitely be unclean, as will the spouse as well. So, the encouragement is: Stay married. As far as it depends on you: Stay married. Live together in peace. Be a good influence. Live the Christian life. Your mission is to “be Jesus” in your family.

Conclusion:

So, is there a “Pauline Privilege” for divorce and remarriage? The only privilege Paul gives here is that if an unbelieving spouse insists on leaving, we are not (and have never been) enslaved, and he allows us to let them leave in peace. What he does not allow is a new relationship. In fact, divorce, as we understand it today, is not even being considered here.

As we close, we need to ask the “So what” question, and for those of us who are married, it seems obvious to me that if marriage really is for life, if what Paul says here is true, we need to work at it. We need to rededicate ourselves to spending time together. We need to communicate. We need to bear each other’s burdens. Anything that interferes with us needs to go. Our relationship with each other has to come before even the relationship we have with our own children. Our marriage comes first, second only to God himself. And when we live like this, we treat our marriage as a permanent commitment, knowing that the Word explains that marriage is to last for a lifetime. If there’s something wrong, we fix it. We invest in marriage, because it’s important to us.

I realize this has been something of a specific question. And again, if this makes no sense whatsoever, I sincerely hope you will let me know. Hopefully next week we can look at the rest of this chapter and what Paul has to say about living the single life. But for now we want to close with an invitation. If there’s something we can be

praying about, let us know. If you want to know more about becoming a Christian, let us know. Jesus came to this earth, he lived a perfect life, he died for our sins, and he was raised up on the third day. We respond to that through our obedience to the good news. In 1 Peter 3:21, baptism is described as an appeal to God for a good conscience. If we can help with this, we'd be honored if you would let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com