

# Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## THE PRETEND PRIVILEGE

by Lee Moses

People have always sought to find “loopholes” in God’s law. When people do not like what it teaches, they twist it to mean something else. Perhaps nowhere in the 21st century church is this more obvious than in the novel doctrines that have arisen pertaining to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. One person betrothed for an unscriptural marriage allegedly agreed the arrangement was not according to Scripture—adding, “But my dad is a preacher, and he’s looking for a loophole.” Consider what those who make such efforts are saying. A “loophole” is defined as “an ambiguity or inadequacy in the law or a set of rules.”<sup>1</sup> The New Testament, the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21), is not ambiguous (Ephesians 3:4; 5:17), nor is it inadequate (Psalm 19:7; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Yet some try to find ambiguity and inadequacy in a statement Paul made in a chapter addressing many different questions about marriage:

*And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him....But 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 (1 Corinthians 7:13, 15).*

Some have twisted this passage to say, “If your spouse divorces you, you are free to remarry.” This interpretation is sometimes called the “Pauline Privilege.” However, it is more accurately called the “Pretend

Privilege,” because it is a fabrication out of the imagination of those who would circumvent the word of God. Let us look more closely at what “*not under bondage*” means in this passage.

### Three Key Rules of Interpretation

When determining the Bible’s meaning, one must apply sensible rules of interpretation. Consider the following rules derived from D.R. Dungan’s textbook on *Hermeneutics*, a standard in laying out Biblical rules for Biblical interpretation.

#### 1. The Bible Harmonizes

All Scripture is authored by God (2 Tim. 3:16). God is perfect in His authorship—He does not change His mind about passages He has inspired (1 Samuel 15:29), nor did He forget what He inspired in an earlier passage when inspiring a later passage (Deuteronomy 4:31; Psalm 147:5). Therefore, Scriptures do not contradict each other.

When addressing the subject of divorce, Jesus said,

*Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away [‘divorce,’ New King James Version] your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, **except** it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:8-9; emph. LM).*

The word “*except*” is very strong. When Jesus said, “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (John 3:5), He made it clear that there are not additional exceptions. One cannot choose to enter into the kingdom of God by other means, such as “faith only” or a “sinner’s prayer”—being born of water and of the Spirit is the only way one can enter into the kingdom.

Likewise, Christ granted one exception allowing divorce and remarriage—fornication by one’s spouse gives the innocent party that right. Any interpretation of another passage that would grant additional exceptions must be rejected.

#### 2. Clearer Passages Explain Problem Passages

When we are uncertain as to the meaning of a passage, the best commentary is the Bible. What do other clearer passages have to say on a subject?

To apply the phrase *not under bondage* to marriage is unallowable, as will be seen later. But before getting to that point, one must realize that such an interpretation would involve figurative language. If one were to say, “I’m not under bondage,” what would lead you to think that person was speaking about his eligibility for remarriage? Nothing. And before one takes the leap of saying *not under bondage* in First Corinthians 7:15 grants eligibility for remarriage, consider what clearer passages have to say on the subject.

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The language of Jesus in Matthew 19:9 is very clear. If one divorces for a reason other than the fornication of one's spouse, and remarries, that subsequent marriage is adulterous. Or if one is divorced by one's spouse, and remarries, that subsequent marriage is adulterous. Matthew 5:32, Mark 10:11-12, and Romans 7:2-3 are likewise clear in explaining this. While such passages may not tell us exactly what "*not under bondage*" means in First Corinthians 7:15, they tell us what it does **not** mean. Other clear passages to be considered later will help us to see what it **does** mean.

### 3. Passages Need to Be Interpreted in Context

Before one decides he has found himself a Biblical loophole, he must consider the context of the passage. Again, this chapter is addressing various questions the Corinthians had concerning marriage (verse 1).

And look more closely at verse 15 and the immediately surrounding verses. Neither remarriage nor the prospect of remarriage is anywhere to be found in this context. This is not the question under consideration. The question under consideration is, "What does a Christian do with regard to an unbelieving spouse?" As one commentator says, "In a context in which people are arguing for the right to dissolve marriage, Paul would scarcely be addressing the issue of remarriage."<sup>2</sup>

And the context could certainly not be **allowing** such remarriages. Just a few verses earlier, Paul had said,

*And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).*

Paul makes clear that he is simply repeating what the Lord had taught (Matt. 19:9). If a separation takes place in a marriage, Paul gives two options—remain unmarried, or be reconciled. Why would Paul just a few verses later say, "Forget what I said before—you are free to remarry"? The answer—he wouldn't.

### Marriage is Not Bondage

The explanation given by those who find a loophole in First Corinthians 7:15 is that "*not under bondage*" means the believer is no longer bound to his unbelieving spouse. However, the word "bondage" has nothing to do directly with the bonds of marriage.

"Bondage" simply means "**slavery**." "Bondage" is found 39 times in the King James Version. In each of these uses, it refers to slavery. For example, "*And they made their lives bitter with hard **bondage**, in*

*mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour*" (Exodus 1:14, emph. LM). Would one dream of thinking Moses here wrote about marriage? "And they made their lives bitter with hard **marriage**"?!? When the Jews told Jesus, "*We be Abraham's seed, and were never in **bondage** to any man*" (John 8:33), were they affirming they were still bachelors? Of course not—Jesus had told them how they could become free, and they questioned why they needed to be freed—they had never been slaves, of which they were aware. The primary definition of the English word is "the state of being a slave."<sup>3</sup> The Greek word Paul used is defined, "to make someone a slave," with the figurative usage, "to make one subservient to one's interests, to cause to be like a slave."<sup>4</sup> Several modern translations, such as the English Standard Version, translate First Corinthians 7:15, "*the brother or sister is not **enslaved**.*"

Brother Harold Littrell further explains, "ENSLAVED, from *douloo*, to reduce to servitude, enslave; oppress by retaining in servitude. . . . The brother or sister had never been a slave to the departing unbeliever. The relationship had been that of husband and wife; not master and slave."<sup>5</sup> The point Paul makes when he says, "*A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases*" is that no one is obligated to leave the Lord to remain in the same household with his or her spouse. If one were to leave the Lord for this purpose, he or she would be viewing his marriage as a slave/master relationship. However, as Jesus said, "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other*" (Matthew 6:24). The Lord is to be our Master.

## A State That Never Existed

One need not know Greek to know the truth. Yet some Biblical truths are driven home by the smallest “jots” and “tittles,” including the grammatical choices the Holy Spirit made when inspiring the original text of the New Testament. The tense used in the phrase “*not under bondage*” is known as the **perfect** tense. The perfect tense “describes an event that, completed in the past, has results in the present time.”<sup>6</sup> This tense is used when Scripture quotes Scripture with the phrase, “*It is written*” (Matthew 2:5; 4:4; Romans 1:17; et al.). This tense is used to show that, yes, the Scripture may have been written in past time, but it continues to have abiding force today. But notice when Paul uses this tense, he says, “*A brother or a sister is not under bondage.*” It is **not** the case as the perfect tense would express. Thus, Paul says in effect, “A brother or sister has **not** completed the act in the past of being brought under bondage, and thus, could **not** in the present time continue to have abiding results of bondage.” Paul makes clear that this “bondage” had **never** existed. Yet the marriage certainly had. And neither party could be permitted to remarry until a Scriptural divorce or death of a spouse occurred (Romans 7:2-3).

## Conclusion

Our Lord clearly stated, “*And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*” (Matthew 19:9). Paul never disputed the Lord’s teaching, nor sought a way around it, but rather reinforced it (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Some misrepresent Paul by saying he provided the right to remarry to

unscripturally divorced persons. It is inaccurate to call this loophole the “Pauline Privilege,” because Paul never granted it. It is a “Pretend Privilege,” fabricated by those who would rather circumvent the word of God than obey it.

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford American College Dictionary*, s.v. “loophole.”

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 303.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford American College Dictionary*, s.v. “bondage.”

<sup>4</sup> *Douloō*, in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 260.

<sup>5</sup> *English Study Bible: New Testament, Translation and Notes* (Paragould, AR: Harold Littrell, 1994), p. 272.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p. 573.

# A TREASURER’S SALVATION

by Nathan Brewer

In Acts 8:26, the angel of the Lord tells a preacher named Philip to leave Samaria, north of Jerusalem, and travel southwest, to the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza.

On that road, Philip meets a government official – a treasurer – from Ethiopia. He’s a Jew who’s been to Jerusalem to worship, and now he’s on his way home. The Ethiopian is reading from Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:32). Philip asks the man if he understands what he’s reading, and the treasurer invites Philip to join him in his chariot to study.

Philip begins at that Old Testament passage and preaches Jesus (Acts 8:35).

As Philip and the Ethiopian travel, they come to a body of water. The Ethiopian says, “*See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*” (Acts 8:36). Why is it that when Philip preaches Jesus and they come to a body of water, the Ethiopian *asks* to be baptized? Preaching Jesus *must* include the requirement to be baptized.

When the Ethiopian confesses that he believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Philip commands the chariot to stop, takes the Ethiopian into the water, and baptizes him (Acts 8:37-38).

As they emerge from the water, Philip receives instructions to go somewhere else. And the Ethiopian

treasurer—formerly a Jew who met a Gospel preacher, heard about Jesus, obeyed the Gospel and was saved—goes “*on his way rejoicing*” (Acts 8:39).

The Ethiopian treasurer had been reading a passage in Isaiah 53 which, about 700 years earlier, predicted the suffering of Christ. The devout Jew didn’t understand who the passage was talking about, but when Philip explained the life of Jesus, the Ethiopian came to understand that Isaiah prophesied about the suffering of Christ. Philip preached Jesus (Acts 8:35). And when they came to water, the treasurer requested baptism.

Just before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He gave the Great Commission. In Mark’s account of it, Jesus tells the apostles to go everywhere preaching the Gospel. Then He says, “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mark 16:15-16).

In Acts 8, Philip preaches Jesus, the Ethiopian believes the message, is baptized, and is saved. Baptism is a common thread in all of the conversions in the book of Acts.

Trying to be saved before baptism, or without baptism, is unbiblical. If you were told to be saved any other way, you were told error, and you are still in your sins.

## SUNDRY AND DIVERS MATTERS

If you have not recently been to the *Fulton County Gospel News* website at [www.fultoncountygospelnews.org](http://www.fultoncountygospelnews.org), we would encourage you to take a peek. Webmaster Brian Dixon has made additional improvements to the site, particularly giving both e-mail and regular subscribers the ability to manage their subscriptions via the website. This has been set up to be more secure than the previous way of requesting and cancelling subscriptions via the website. From the main site, there is a link reading "User Account FAQ" that you can click to learn more. Of course, we're still happy to comply with subscription requests received by phone, e-mail, regular mail, or even in person.

We often include a little reminder in *FCGN* urging you to inform us of any anticipated address changes. Please pay attention to this. The costs of mailing *FCGN* have increased dramatically in recent years, yet the cost of each returned piece is far greater than the basic cost of mailing it out. We very much appreciate the support of all the churches and brethren listed on this page, and of the Mammoth Spring church of Christ—let's put their contributions to the best possible use.

"For a parent to require a child to wash his face and keep his body clean and not require him to learn and obey the Bible, is to teach him that the body is worth more than a pure heart and a clean and holy spirit. For a parent to require a child to learn spelling and reading and not require him to study the Bible is to teach him, by a forcible object lesson, that it is more important to be qualified to live in this world than to be fitted to live in heaven. There is no evading this simple truth. The parent that so treats and impresses his child is the worst enemy that the child has. He will be made to feel this when he meets that child at the judgment of God. It is better to face the question honestly now" (David Lipscomb).

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### GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

### THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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