

# What Does the Bible Say about the Right to Privacy?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## Introduction:

### A. The origin of the concept of the right to privacy

1. "The right to privacy is the time-travel paradox of constitutional law: even though it didn't exist as a constitutional doctrine until 1961, and didn't form the basis of a Supreme Court ruling until 1965, it is in some respects the oldest constitutional right. It is the right to privacy that forms the common foundation of the freedom of conscience outlined in the First Amendment, the right to be secure in one's person outlined in the Fourth Amendment, and the right to refuse self-incrimination outlined in the Fifth Amendment - despite the fact that the word "privacy" itself appears nowhere in the U.S. Constitution.

2. "The origins of the right to privacy can be traced to the nineteenth century. In 1890, Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis published "The Right to Privacy," an influential article that postulated a general common-law right of privacy. Before the publication of this article, no U.S. court had expressly recognized such a legal right. Since the publication of the article, courts have relied on it in hundreds of cases presenting a range of privacy issues.

3. "In Constitutional Law, the right of people to make personal decisions regarding intimate matters; under the Common Law, the right of people to lead their lives in a manner that is reasonably secluded from public scrutiny, whether such scrutiny comes from a neighbor's prying eyes, an investigator's eavesdropping ears, or a news photographer's intrusive camera; and in statutory law, the right of people to be free from unwarranted drug testing and Electronic Surveillance."

(<http://civilliberty.about.com/od/equalrights/tp/Where-Did-the-Right-to-Privacy-Origins-Come-From.htm>)

### B. But, what does the Word of God say about it? - Eph. 5:8-17

## I. CURRENT ROLE OF RIGHT TO PRIVACY

### A. In our society, the concept of a right to privacy has taken on a significant role

1. Several years ago, two men arrested for committing homosexual acts won their case by arguing that what was done in the privacy of their home could not be used against them. Laws against homosexuality were struck from Texas law as a result.
2. A polygamist in Utah, who is also a judge, argued that what he does in the privacy of his home and in personal relationships should not be a consideration whether he keeps his job. He works at a job upholding Utah's laws while at the same time breaking those laws in private.
3. This reasoning originated with Roe vs. Wade. The fundamental defense was that a woman's pregnancy was a private issue. Therefore, the government should not prevent an abortion because it violated the woman's right to privacy.

## II. BIBLICAL INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

### A. The reason stealing is wrong is because God ordained that property can belong to an individual - Ex. 20:15

1. Ex. 22:1-4 - There are private possessions and privacy in homes. Privacy is for protecting what belongs to an individual, but sin is not ours to keep.
2. Some argue that early disciples shared everything - Acts 2:44-45, 4:32
  - a. Their sharing was a voluntary revocation of property rights and an attitude of willingness to share what was theirs by right.
  - b. It was not forced or required of them; it was generosity and brotherly love in action
  - c. Acts 5:4 - They were not required to sell their property or to give the entire amount
- B. The marriage relationship is privately kept by the married couple - 1Cor. 7:4
  1. Adultery is viewed as a violation of what privately belongs to another
  2. Our mates do not belong to strangers, nor do strangers share any rights to our mates - Heb. 13:4; Prov. 5:15-20
- C. The erring argument is that sin is acceptable when it is done privately.

### **III. TRUTH EXPOSES SIN**

- A. John 3:19-21 - This is the reason men hated Jesus
- B. It is a Christian's duty to uphold the light and expose the evil done in secret
  1. Eph. 5:11-13
- C. Though many think their sins are secret, they have a tendency to come to light
  1. Num. 32:23 - Resenting the exposure does not diminish the sin
  2. This is the fallacy in arguments about "right to privacy" in regard to sin
  3. The reason the matter is known is because the sin didn't remain secret
  4. What is being argued is that because it was something intended to remain secret, it is therefore justification for the acceptability of the sin when it becomes known.
- D. Our world has accepted this
  1. "Well, I can't judge what a person does in the privacy of his own home."
  2. The secrecy of an activity has no impact on its morality, right or wrong.
- E. We cannot avoid the consequences of wrongful actions - Gal. 6:7-8

### **IV. PRIVATE SINS HAVE PUBLIC CONSEQUENCES**

- A. Achan stole from Jericho in secret, but God publicly exposed him
  1. Joshua 7:10-12, 19-25
- B. David's private sin with Bathsheba was publically exposed by Nathan
  1. 2Sam. 12:7-13; Psalm 19:12

### **V. SIN CANNOT REMAIN HIDDEN**

- A. It will not bring us any advantage - Prov. 28:13
- B. Attempting to hide sin hurts the sinner - Psalm 32:3-5
- C. Ultimately we will all be judged by God, who is not influenced by the US Supreme Court, nor by your notions of what you do in private. He will reveal the hidden things for the scrutiny and judgment of all - 1Cor. 4:4-5
  1. Nothing is private before God. There will be no argument that it was a private matter in the Judgment - Psalm 90:8