

## John 11 7-22-18 Got Privilege?

I've been looking forward to teaching on this subject, ever since I heard about the event that sparked the idea. Did you hear what went on at George Washington University in April? There in our nation's capital this private college held a training session for students and faculty to inform them that Christians *receive unmerited perks from institutions and systems all across our country*. The April 5 workshop entitled "Christian Privilege" was put on by the university's Multicultural Services Center, and taught that Christians enjoy a privileged, easier life than their non-Christian counterparts. There you go. The thought of such a thing going on put a smile on my face and provokes me to comment on it from a Biblical perspective. So, this is not our usual Sunday message rooted in a Biblical text, but before we are finished, you will hear plenty of God's word brought to bear on some matters of great relevance. Let's go. I have a three-part outline in response to the Christian Privilege seminar. Consider then a partial truth, an ignorant claim and a repurposed term.

We start with a partial truth. The point of the seminar at GWU is that there are advantages to being a Christian in the USA. I am limiting it to the USA because clearly in other parts of the world where Christians are beaten for their faith, imprisoned for their faith and have their churches burned down, the notion of Christian privilege is manifestly absurd. So, I assume any claim of Christian privilege is meant to apply to the U.S. only. I also assume that the purpose of teaching on this is to urge those enjoying Christian privilege to have sympathy on those who do not have it. Nothing wrong with that as far as it goes. And concerning such, we should admit that there is some truth to the proposition that Christians in the US are advantaged. I looked up "Christian privilege" on the web and two sites had a long list of ways that we Christians have it better than others in this country. Here are some of the points made.

#1 – *You get time off for major religious holidays*. Not true for all of us. I have to work on Christmas Eve and Easter but you likely don't. Now, frankly, apart from Christmas day I don't know what holiday this would refer to, but Christmas day is worth something.

#2 – *Music and TV shows pertaining to your religion's holidays are readily accessible*. That is certainly true. There is no Peanuts Ramadan special. I am not familiar with a single Hanukkah carol. We have Christian radio stations, Christian movies, Duck Dynasty, Chik-fil-A, Tim Tebow. No denying this point.

#3 – *In most places you can find an educational option rooted in your faith.* That is right! Thank God for that. We have Blackburn Study Center right here at our church. We have Eden Christian Academy, Geneva College, Grove City College – all right near us. The Hindus and Buddhists have nothing to compare with that.

Privilege #4 – *You can go anywhere and assume you will be surrounded by members of your faith.* Again, I say *Praise God* - that is blessedly the case isn't it? God has his people everywhere and especially in our country. Fewer of them live in Maine and Oregon but even in those places you can find sweet fellowship with those who love Jesus. For people of other, minority, religions, I expect that is not the case outside the major cities.

One more example of an alleged Christian privilege that is accurate. #5 is that *You can go without knowing about other faiths without consequence.* This one is especially interesting so I want to repeat it -- *You can go without knowing about other faiths without consequence.* This is probably the biggest difference really and I appreciate the good folks on the web pointing this out. I could not agree more. You see, if you don't know anything about Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam or atheistic secularism, you lose nothing. No consequence of being ignorant of what they teach and claim. This they are contrasting with Christianity. The implication of their point is that if you don't know about Jesus, if you are ignorant of the Christian faith, there are and will be significant negative consequences. Wow! That is so true! I believe that with all my heart and that is why I have devoted my life to teaching people about the Christian faith. Without the knowledge of Jesus and His grace, His salvation, His kingdom, you are seriously missing out. Show up on judgment day clueless about the story of Mohammed, unacquainted with the Dalai Lama, naïve on the writings of Confucius and you face no consequence. Show up before a holy God without a Savior, without the Lord Jesus Christ and you have no hope. I'm not sure that's what the writers on the web were thinking when they wrote this, but they were spot on.

So, clearly, there are some advantages that we Jesus followers have in a nation like ours - advantages that some others among us will lack. Give credit where it is due. But then let's take a different angle and note that some of the claims of Christian privilege are rooted in a great deal of ignorance. Again, I go to the articles on the web. Foolish claim #1 - *People don't usually appropriate and trivialize sacred symbols of your religion.* I don't know how this happens to people of other faiths but concerning some Christian advantage in this area my response is, "Really?" When is the last time someone used *Mohammed* as a curse word around you? Or

shouted, “*Charles Darwin!*” when the Steelers fumble? But the precious name of my Lord, that name that is above every name, has become a common expletive in our society. In the locker room at the gym, on the basketball court, in the mall, in our movies, you hear it constantly – the name of Jesus, the name of God, dragged through the mud. To have missed this suggests you aren’t paying attention.

Here is another supposed privilege we have- #2 - *You can practice your religious customs without being questioned, mocked, or inhibited.* Wow! Have any of you ever had your religious practices questioned or mocked? Any of you? Am I the only one? This suggests that the person coming up with this list has never been or even talked to an actual Jesus follower in America, which I would think would be a prerequisite for writing an article about what it’s like for Christians in America.

Another supposed privilege #3 – *Politicians can make decisions citing your faith without being labeled as heretics or extremists.* Really? Is this writer paying attention at all? Amy Coney Barrett was one of the finalists for the recent Supreme Court nomination. When she was approved as a Circuit Court judge a senator from California voted and spoke against her because she is a serious Catholic. The Senator famously commented to Barrett that, “The dogma lives loudly within you.” Sounds like a line from Star Wars doesn’t it? *The dogma lives loudly within you.* It suggests that if you are serious about your faith, if the dogma of your church isn’t muffled within you you aren’t qualified to be a judge in our country. This from an article in [www.Patheos.com](http://www.Patheos.com) about Barrett: *Dangerous Catholic extremist: Amy Coney Barrett, a leading candidate for a soon-to-be-vacant Supreme Court seat, claims the Bible precedes the Constitution. Barrett is a dangerous religious extremist who believes her religious faith comes before the law.* You want another eighty examples of this kind of thing? Should I mention what happens now if a public figure indicates he or she lines up with the Biblical view on marriage and sexuality? Probably not – we should move along.

Another privilege – call it #4 - *You can expect your children to have many teachers who share your faith.* Hmm. Depends where your children are in school. Depends on what you mean by “many.” But more importantly, what we know that the author does not is that you can also expect your child to have many teachers who attack your faith. Right? I mean, I went to college in the 70s and even then Christianity was held up to scorn. It surely isn’t better today. And the reality is that no other religious group experiences that. You can’t mock atheism or Islam or

Hinduism, but it is open season on anything approaching a Scriptural faith. And when issues surrounding the sexual revolution come up, the vitriol toward serious Christian students and teachers is hot and getting hotter.

Listen, one of the fundamental errors of many who write on these things is to not recognize and admit that secularism is a faith too, and that it is the majority faith in our culture and certainly in our educational institutions. I don't hear anyone talking about secular-progressive privilege, but it is the adherents of that religion that really have the advantage in most of our schools and the allegiance of a preponderance of our teachers. And, oh yes, there may be Christian school alternatives - usually very expensive ones, but the secular-progressive schools in the U.S. are supported by our tax dollars and are frequently hostile to historic Christian belief. You do know this right? Somehow those teaching on Christian privilege have missed it.

Here is another that is misleading in a different way. #5- It says we Christians advantaged because - *Your community can build and attend a place of worship without being targeted for violence.* Okay, that is true, with some notable exceptions – but what is implied? Muslims can't do that? Unitarians can't do that? All the Buddhist temples get blown up? Where in the USA is this supposed violence against minority religious groups? The question implies something just plain false.

Okay, check this advantage out - #6 *You can go into any career you want without having to explain your faith.* I just want to say that this was not my experience. When I entered my career I had to do a great deal of explaining my faith, to the Presbytery, to the churches that hired me. Funny huh? But seriously, what jobs require this of folks? I truly do not know what this supposed privilege is about.

I love this alleged privilege - #7 *You can reasonably assume that anyone you encounter will have decent understanding of your beliefs.* Wow! This is not my experience at all. Indeed, I don't find that the author of this article has a decent understanding of my beliefs.

So, the many claims of Christian privilege are quite mixed. Some of them clearly true, while others are mostly nonsense, often the exact opposite of the reality we experience as Jesus-people in the USA. But let's take now a turn in our thinking. Having looked at a partial truth and some ignorant claims, let's consider now a term repurposed. The term is "Christian privilege." We have seen what some mean by that term, but now I want to take it to a different place and

suggest that the good folks at George Washington and elsewhere have unintentionally, unwittingly stumbled upon one of the greatest truths in the universe. Sometimes this kind of thing happens. Someone says something they mean one way, but taken a different way it points to a brilliant reality. An example of this is in John's gospel chapter 11. This is the chapter in which Jesus raises from the dead Mary's brother Lazarus. This was the singular event that precipitated a crisis among the Jews in Jerusalem. I mean the news of a resurrection by a popular rabbi is not something to be ignored. We read of how people responded starting in John 11:**45-48** *Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. 47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."* Interesting huh? Did they hold a serious investigation into the claim being made? Were they prepared to confirm the resurrection of Lazarus and then turn over all their power to this new, astounding prophet? Did they hatch a plan to see if Jesus would raise more people from the dead and heal the sick among them? Not at all. They immediately saw how the growing reputation of Jesus could impact them negatively. They were afraid that the Romans would see the Jesus movement as a threat and clamp down on the Jewish nation, diminishing the rights of self-government they had enjoyed. They saw themselves losing power and possibly freedom, and they decided they had to stop it. We read on **49-53** *But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." 51 Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.* What is going on here? Caiaphas, the high priest, decided that doing away with Jesus was a wise and just decision because if they did not they might lose their favored nation status with the Romans and many would suffer. So, let's have one die for all. And then the commentary by John in verse 51 that Caiaphas was unwittingly prophesying about the atoning death of Jesus, how He would, in fact, die in the place of many, both Jews and Gentiles. What Caiaphas said was true, but not in the way he meant it. You see? Just so may we regard the

talk of Christian privilege, the claim that Christians are an advantaged people who have rights and blessings others do not have. That is more true than they have imagined, but in a somewhat different way.

So, let's discuss the privileges of being a Jesus follower. Not those relevant only for us in the U.S., but those that attach to believers everywhere. Before I get to my list, I wonder what comes to your mind? When you think of the privileges that are ours as Christians what comes to your mind? Thank you....Speaking to believers in Jesus, Paul wrote: Romans 5:2 (NLT) *Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.* Now I offer my short list of Christian privileges, very abridged.

First, I think of the privilege of knowing God, of having a relationship with Him, of living my life in His presence and before His face. Knowing God – there is no greater privilege imaginable really. Paul said in Philippians 3 that compared to it, everything else is so much rubbish. And then you think about the nature of that relationship. We are called God's friends, God's servants, and most often and most powerfully, God's children. How privileged are we you ask? We get to be in the family of God. I John 3:1 *See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God.* We eat at His table. We call Him Abba, Father. As His children, we are invited to speak with Him any time we want. Romans 8:15 *You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"* I think of that old hymn that says, *What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grieves to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.* That is our Christian privilege, our privilege as beloved sons and daughters of the King. And we don't just have it for this time and place, we enjoy this relationship forever because when God sets his love on you, disconnection is impossible. His is an eternal love. His love never fails, it never gives up, and it never runs out. Paul asks the rhetorical question in Romans 8:35 *Who will separate us from the love of Christ?* And the answer comes that nothing, no-thing, no one, no event can separate us from that love. Man oh man – we are talking privilege! And I would love to do seminars about this at every campus in America.

Another privilege we have as Christians is the privilege of guidance and purpose. Guidance and purpose. Most folks have no idea what they are doing here, why they are alive – we do. We know we are here to glorify God and enjoy Him and expand His kingdom. We have

this extraordinary, challenging, fulfilling reason for being that others sadly lack. Associated with it is a book sent to us from a loving God chock full of His wisdom for living. His word is according to Psalm 119:**105** *A lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* David also said Psalm 119:**98-99** *Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies...99 I have more insight than all my teachers.* That is not fair is it? We Christians are privileged. We have enormous advantages. And, as though having the word of God is not advantage enough, God sends us His Spirit to live with us, to guide us, to be our personal instructor. I mean, this is all an embarrassment of riches isn't it? Feeling guilty yet? You – you Christian!

I speak somewhat tongue-in-cheek, I hope you know. The point of talking about Christian privilege is not so you would feel guilty but so you would feel overwhelmed with blessing, filled up with joy, but also so you would appropriately pity, care for, love those who lack these privileges that are ours. The great thing about Christian privilege, unlike white privilege, is that it is open to anyone. One of the great errors I hear in modern social debates is to lump chosen qualities in with unchosen ones. I mean, a person's sexual choices are viewed on a par with one's race or gender. Christian schools are told they may not discriminate based on gender or race, and that's one thing, but then they are told the same about the sexual choices of their students. But those they have a choice about. You see the difference there? To the extent that there is white privilege you have that by birth or not at all – but with respect to Christian privilege the good news is that you too can enter in and enjoy all that is there for us in Jesus and in His church. I John 1:**3-4** (NLT) *We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.* Jesus is throwing a grand party and everyone who desires to come may. And we would love it if you would join us.

But there is still more to talk about in the way of Christian privilege. This one is rather odd I guess, but the Bible does talk about it. It is the privilege of suffering for Jesus and with Jesus. Suffering – yea. Philippians 1:**29** (NLT) *For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for Him.* Well, I guess there are actually two privileges mentioned there huh? The privilege of trusting in Christ. That is awesome isn't? The gift of faith. Man what a privilege that is! The capacity to know you are loved, your sins are paid for and forgiven, your eternity is secure, you have a home in heaven. Amazing! But then Paul

says that on top of that – you have the privilege of suffering for Jesus. Hmm! That is a little harder to understand, but the key words are in the prepositional phrase, *for Him. For Him.* Suffering is not a privilege unless or until it is *for Him* and the truth is that Jesus is so wonderful that anything we get to do for Him is a privilege. I get to preach for Him and I can relate to what Paul said in Ephesians 3:8 (NLT) *Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, He graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.* You bet, that is a privilege, but because it is for Jesus, so too is suffering. By suffering with Him we share fellowship with Him in our affliction. We also share a reward. Jesus made huge promises to His servants who suffer for His name and His kingdom. He said your reward will be great in the glory to come. For this reason the apostle was able to say in Romans 8:18 *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* For Paul this was more than just a positive confession. He had plenty of opportunity to live it out under pressure. In Acts 26 he stood before King Agrippa, the man over Jerusalem at that time and told the story of his transformative encounter with the risen Jesus. In response, Agrippa replied to him, **28-29** *“In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”* 29 *And Paul said, “I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.”* Paul the prisoner, Paul the persecuted said to a wealthy, powerful, ruler that he lovingly wished Agrippa and all his hearers were as blessed and rich as he was. He didn't suggest being a prisoner was so great, but he was testifying mightily that despite that, he was not one to be pitied, but envied, for he knew God and enjoyed every spiritual blessing through Jesus.

His reaction to persecution? He out-rejoiced them all! Our reaction to persecution? To the minor put-downs and hostilities we may and likely will incur? Let's out-rejoice them brethren! Let's show by our joy that what we have in Jesus makes us the most privileged, wealthy, glad people in the world – not because of a thing we have achieved, but because of what we have received as the objects of those mercies which flow to us from the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian privilege? You bet! May we all feel it, enjoy it and proclaim it to a disadvantaged world. Amen?