

Divine Guidelines for Marriage

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:8-16

Code: 1829

This morning, we're continuing our look at 1 Corinthians, chapter 7, and we'll look at verses 8 through 16 this morning, discussing divine guidelines for marriage – divine guidelines for marriage – 1 Corinthians 7:8 to 16, and we are continuing in our study of 1 Corinthians. You know, it's difficult in our world, I think, to maintain a marriage; to maintain any kind of a lasting relationship. Fifteen million Americans, according to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau statistic, have gone through a divorce. People find it extremely difficult to build lasting relationships with any kind of meaning at all. One divorce for every 2.56 marriages now in America, and it's rising. Interestingly enough, the highest divorce rate in the world is in Russia. Russian cities have a three out of four divorce rate. Also, I was interested to read somewhere that the number one song in Russia in 1974 was "Love Story." We talk a lot about it even here in America, but find it very difficult to maintain any kind of love relationship.

And unfortunately, what we experience is not a historical phenomenon that is new; it's something that has always been around. And if you go to 1 Corinthians, chapter 7, you'll find that there was a terrible problem existing in Corinth, and it dealt with the whole area of marriage. And that is the problem to which Paul speaks in the seventh chapter. The Corinthians didn't really know what they should do in terms of marriage, or at least they weren't willing to admit what they should do, and posed some questions to Paul about it. The first verse of chapter 7 says that "you wrote unto me concerning these issues," and he proceeds to answer them. Like every other area of their lives, the Corinthians had managed to botch up the area of marriage. They had fouled up everything else; there was no reason to believe that they would make it in this area. And so Paul writes chapter 7 to deal with their misconceptions and misbehaviors in terms of marriage. They were confused over whether it was right to be single, and whether necessary to be single if you're going to be spiritual, or whether it was right to be married, and necessary to be married if you were going to be spiritual. The Jews in the congregation, because it was an orthodox Jewish belief, would have propagated the fact that you had to be married. And if you weren't married you were out of God's will, and you were to be excluded from heaven.

On the other hand, there were many people who had a rather growing fascination with celibacy, and they were more concerned with remaining single as a spiritual value. In other words, if they were single, they would be able to give to God a higher devotion, they would move to a higher plane of spiritual life if they weren't married, and there were some who would go as far as to say that sex of any kind was, if nothing else, certainly a misdirection of effort, and could well be channeled in the area of service to God rather than attachment to a wife or a husband. Some were saying the truly

devoted Christian wouldn't marry at all. Well, this carried so far that truly devoted people who were Christians were saying, "We ought to get a divorce. In order that we might better serve the Lord, we'll split up." Or, if they wanted to stay together, "We will withdraw ourselves from all physical relationship, no more sexual relations in our marriage. We'll just devote ourselves to God and not get dragged into those physical things." So all kinds of problems and confusion ruled the marital scene in Corinth, and they wrote Paul asking for answers.

Basically, the questions were these: Is marriage a command? Do you have to be married to please God? Should single people, then, marry, or is it more spiritual to stay single? And are you a more devoted Christian if you're not married? Another question that came out of this is should marry people who become Christians then abstain from all sexual relationship? And should a Christian married to a non-Christian divorce that non-Christian, in order not to have a mixed marriage and unite Christ with a pagan? These were the questions. And the seventh chapter really clearly answers these questions.

Now, last time we looked at verses 1 to 7, and we saw in verses 1 to 7 general principles regarding marriage. And what Paul said, by way of a brief summary, is this: marriage is normal; marriage is for the majority. God has made us to marry. Marriage is good, but marriage is not an absolute commandment for everybody, because God has, according to verse 7, given some people the *charisma* or the gift of being single; the ability by the Holy Spirit to totally control sexual desire. And if that's what God's gifted you with, then your singleness is a unique gift of God and ought to be used for His glory. So marriage is the norm; it isn't commanded, it isn't an absolute, but it is the norm to avoid fornication and sexual involvement. You should get married. But for some, who have the gift of being single, that's a special blessing of God, and it should be maintained because it puts you in a position to be used by Him in a very unique way. So there is the general principle. Marriage is normal. Singleness is the exception; it's a gift of God. If you have it, then it's something you ought to hold to and cherish as a special gift from God.

Now, he takes that principle in verses 8 to 16, and applies it to four groups – four groups. First group is the single people. Second group is the people who are married and both are Christians. Third group, those married to an unbeliever who wants to stay. Fourth group, those married to an unbeliever who wants out. Four groups, and every one of you here is in one of those groups. Let's look at group one and see how he applies the principle. Those who are unmarried and widows, verse 8: "I say therefore" – that is, therefore, meaning on the basis of the principle laid down – "I say therefore to the unmarried" – and that is a general term including bachelors, maidens, divorcees. "I say to the unmarried, and especially to the widows" - because, of course, they had a unique situation, having been married and knowing all of the joys of marriage, and having been separated not because they wish to be, like a divorcee, but because of death and the trauma that that brings. "I say then to the unmarried, and especially to widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I." It's good to be single. If you're a bachelor, that's good. If you're a maiden who's never been married, that's good. If you're a widow or a widower, that's good. There's nothing wrong with that. And good means

beneficial, excellent and just good. It isn't wrong. Don't listen to those orthodox Jews who are saying if you're not married, you're abnormal. And you know, we tend to fall into that category.

We find some poor young person who's about 28, and we want to play Cupid all the time. "You've got to get married – you can't just go through life – you've got to start looking." We want to push these people into getting married. Don't do that. God may have given them the gift of celibacy, and if so, then maybe being married is in violation of God's very best for their life. There are some things in this world that single people are needed to do. It's all right if you've got somebody who's saying, "I've got to get married." You can help them. But if somebody just – and they need help, see. But if you have somebody who has no interest in that, and they feel that God has given them the gift of being able to control sexual desire outside of marriage, then let it be that way, and God will fulfill them in a very unique way. He simply says here, "It is a good thing for them if they abide even as I."

And, of course, at this time, Paul was single. He may have been married, since marriage appears to be a necessity for a member of the Sanhedrin, which he once was. It is, however, likely that his wife died before he was converted, and his time of ministry for Christ was always as a single individual, as best we can tell. And so once he had been widowed, if that is the case indeed, then he maintained that because God gave him that gift, that charisma of celibacy; that ability to be single and not to be preoccupied with sex and marriage. So it's a good thing. Look at verse 25, Paul further talks about this, and we'll get into this in detail in later weeks. "Now, concerning virgins" – or unmarried people – "I have no commandment of the Lord" – the Lord never said anything about the unmarried, never told anybody to get married. He just spoke about the marriage as it already existed. No commandment. "Yet I'm going to give my judgment as one that obtained mercy of the Lord." Now, I'm going to add some revelation to this. "I suppose therefore that this good for the present distress; I say, it is good for a man so to be. Are you bound to a wife? Don't seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Don't seek a wife."

In other words, I guess he would, from just a practical standpoint, "In the world you live in, the sexually, messed-up world of Corinth, it might just be to your advantage to stay the way you are. If you're single, then just stay that way. If you're married, stay that way, for sure." But verse 28 says, "If you marry, you haven't sinned. If a virgin marries, she hasn't" – it's no sin to get married, but it might be to your advantage to stay single. "Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh, but I spare you." "I'd like to spare you the trouble that marriage brings, and it does bring trouble. Don't make a big issue out of marriage if it isn't a necessity for you. It's all right, you won't sin, but if God has given you the ability to be single, cherish that ability; because of its lack of encumbrance, you have a special way in which you can serve God." That's kind of an exciting thing. This is a very special gift that renders you capable of serving God in a very unique way.

Now, I realize that there are pressures in being single, especially of all the current emphasis on marriage and the family, and you kind of feel like a fifth wheel, and I was reading in the *Times* where

they say that at the holiday season, it's worse than ever. Single people, particularly single parents, feel really left out. There's no need to feel that way. If God has given you the gift of celibacy, if God has allowed you to be single for the time, accept that as His plan. There's nothing wrong with being single. Paul advocates it.

You know, Jesus had a conversation with the disciples – I ought to show it to you, Matthew 19 – in which they concluded that it would probably be better to be single. In Matthew 19, Jesus is talking about marriage, and He's giving all the things about marriage, and how that you're not to put your wife away except for fornication, and so forth. And after He got done with all this speech, and the Lord really laid down some strong guidelines for marriage, verse 10, Matthew 19, "His disciples say unto Him, 'If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.'" In other words, man, with all of that going on, it would be better never to get married to begin with. "Yes," Jesus said, "but all men can't receive this saying except they to whom it is given." And here the Lord indicated that it would be fine if everybody stayed single, but everybody can't handle that. And He gives us the introduction into the concept of the *charisma* of verse 7 of 1 Corinthians 7, that you have to have a special gift to be single, and not be preoccupied with sex.

Now, being single opens up all kinds of potential for you to serve the Lord. We should never take somebody who is content with being single and force them into a situation where they think they're not fulfilled and they have to get married. It isn't true. If you're unmarried or widowed, it's a good thing, and you can stay that way. That's fine; you don't have to get married. "But" – verse 9 – "if they can't have self-control, let them marry, for it's better to marry than to burn." If you can't handle being single, get married. Now, we're talking about Christians. Some of you may say, "Well, I don't have that gift, but I can't seem to get married." And the truth of the matter may be that you have sinned in the past, you have violated the principles of God, so you're not in a position now where God is going to bless you with marriage. Or maybe you've disqualified yourself by former marriages in sin, and so forth and so on. But just taking it from point blank zero, let's say you're just a new Christian, or you're starting out, here is God's standard. It is good if God's given you the gift, but if not, then marry; and I believe that assumes that God will provide a partner. How could God command you to marry and not provide a partner?

But, listen to me, people, if you're not the right person, you'll never meet the right partner. That's the whole key. If you're not the right person, you'll never meet the right partner. So instead of looking for the right girl, start being the right man. And, girls, instead of looking for the right man, start being the right woman – and then the right man will recognize the right woman. And so, "let them marry." Now that's an aorist imperative command: "Get married! It's better to marry than to burn." If you're going around just flaming on the inside with desire, then get married! There's no point in saying, "Well, I'm remaining single for the cause of Christ – *rmm, rmm*, you see. That is – you know – that's ridiculous. There's no value in that at all. If you're burning with sexual desire, present tense continues, you continue to burn, then please get married. Marriage, for one thing, will bring about the fulfillment of

that physical desire.

You know, it's never ceased to amaze me, some couple will come to me and they'll say, "John, we just got engaged." You know, and they're real excited, and kind of funny-looking face, you know how you get when you get engaged – sort of happy, but apprehensive. And show you the ring, and, "Well, when you going to get married?" "Oh, we're going to get married in two years." Two years? You know, I hear that. Or "a year – we have to wait till we get some money" – or this – listen. It is better to marry than to burn, and if you're going to go through two years *uhh*, like this, there is no point in it. You know, I tell them, "Don't wait two years; get married in two months." Once you've made that commitment, you put yourself in a position to be tempted, and to see your spiritual life just fade away. Once you've made that vow, get married. Marriage is to help you in that area. There is no advantage in long engagements.

Listen, parents, when your kids come home and say they're engaged, you tell them to get married. Get married fast. "Well, no; we want you to wait and finish your four years of college, and" – *ruh*. You know what you do for the time they're engaged? You destroy their spiritual life, because they can't control the desire because the commitment is already there, see? Paul is saying, "It's fine to be single, and if you have the gift of celibacy, don't let anybody push you into getting married. But if you decide to get married, let everybody push you into it. Get it going, get married. Your singleness is excellent." You say, "Well you know, I don't have the gift, but I'm just waiting for the right partner; what do I do? How do I control my desire in the meantime?" Well, that's a fair question, and we're not really approaching that problem this morning. Let me just give you just some hints that I thought of. How can I, as a single person who is waiting for the fulfillment of my physical desire, waiting for the right mate, how can I control myself? Well, here are some thoughts that you can expand on.

Number one would be channel your energy through physical work and spiritual service. Redirect yourself to good physical work and spiritual service. This gives your energy an outlet. Secondly, don't seek to be married, seek to love and let marriage come as a response. People who are always wanting to get married will marry the wrong person more often than not. But people who are seeking to find the fulfillment of love will marry the person they fall in love with. Don't seek to get married. You know, that's when you go out and you go home, and immediately you take out your notes – let's see, A on this one, and B on this one, and C on this – you check them off, see. "Well, he's close enough; I'll take him if he asks," see. What you're doing, you see, is you're letting marriage be the issue rather than the right person becoming the issue. Seek to be loved and to love, not to be married. Don't worry; marriage will take care of itself.

Thirdly, let go of a sex-mad, adulterous world. And what I mean by that is watch what you absorb of the system. Fourthly, program your mind with divine realities – program your mind. It's amazing, but your behavior is a direct result of the programming of your mind with divine truth. Fifth, recognize that for now God has chosen for you to live without sex; and recognize this: "there's no temptation that

has taken you but such is as common to man. God is faithful, will not allow you to be tempted” – what – “above that you’re able, but will with the temptation make” – what – “a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” Sixth, avoid potentially dangerous situations. That’s like Joseph; he just ran. Seventh, thank and praise God for the state you’re in, and be content. You have to approach it from these standpoints. All right, Paul then says, “If you’re single, great. If you can’t handle it, get married.” So there is not command that everybody has to marry, or that spirituality is being single. No.

All right, second group, and here comes practical advice to those who are married to a Christian; this includes most of us. We have Christian husbands, Christian wives. Now what does he say to us? Verse 10 and 11, “And unto the married” – now you say, “How do you know they’re Christians?” Because he speaks to the ones that are mixed marriages beginning in verse 12, so we know that here he’s speaking to Christians. You’ll see that in a minute. “Unto the married I command, yet it isn’t I but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband. Now, to the married” - now I want you to remember something, remember something we talked about last week. We said that in Rome there were at least four different ways to get married, right, in the Roman Empire? Slaves living in tent companionship, common-law marriage, what we called *usus* marriage, where it was sort of you buy the wife, you pay a certain amount, and then there was the great big *confarreatio*, noble-type marriage. By whatever form, the Bible just says, “Well, whatever a way it was, now the issue isn’t how you got into it, but the issue is stay where you are. If you’re married” – look at it – “I command, yet it isn’t really me doing this, the Lord has given us the word on this, let not the wife depart from her husband.”

And here he’s simply saying - Jesus already had something to say about it; Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:9, and Mark 10:11 and 12. All three of those passages, our Lord Jesus Christ says, “Stay married. Do not divorce.” Notice, it says at the end of verse 10, “Let not the wife depart.” The word depart is a technical term for divorce; “don’t divorce your partner.” You say, “Well, why would two Christians want to divorce?” Well, in Corinth, you see, they were saying, “Well, celibacy is the only way to go. Once you become a Christian you’ve got to drop all the physical part, and you’ve got to devote yourself to Christ. We will now divorce and separate and give ourselves to Christ.” He says, “Forget it – don’t do that. Don’t divorce.” There is no divorce tolerated among Christians. God hates divorce. Malachi 2, “I hate putting away,” God says; “I hate divorce.” He condemned the Israelites, He says: “You have done treacherously against the wife of your youth.” You’re divorcing one another.

Now, some of the Corinthians had already done it – too late. Two Corinthian Christians, they had decided they ought to get a divorce – for spiritual reasons, quote/unquote. Can you imagine how that would run? If the Bible says, “You may get a divorce if you want to devote yourself totally to the Lord?” Can you imagine what would happen? Everybody would be using that excuse just to get rid of the partner they didn’t want. “Well, we’re divorcing for spiritual reasons.” The truth of the matter is you’ve been trying to shed her for years, you just found a verse to prove it, you know, and you can. So God doesn’t allow that. There must be a continuous union. No, “let not the wife depart.” But some had

already done it – some had already done it. Verse 11: “But if she does depart” – now, that assumes that somebody in Corinth had already done it – too late, it’s already happened – what are the consequences? “Let her remain” – what – “unmarried, single the rest of her life or be reconciled to her husband.” Only two choices if Christians divorce. They either stay single all the rest of their life, or they come together again to reconcile.

Now, let me add a footnote, very important footnote. Paul here is not dealing with a case of adultery. That is foreign to his discussion. In cases of adultery – listen to me – divorce was allowed among Christians. Where one Christian commits an adulterous act, God allows for a breaking of that marriage bond. Matthew 5:32, “I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife except for the cause of fornication” – and that can be sexual sin of all kinds – “except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery, and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery.” Except for fornication, no divorce, but in the case of fornication, God says there is divorce. Matthew 19:9, same thing: “And I say, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and marry another commits adultery.” The only ground that Jesus ever gave for the dissolution of a marriage was sexual immorality, and when that occurs, there is the right to divorce.

That is very clear even in the case of Joseph. You remember that in Matthew 1, Joseph was shocked when he found out that Mary was pregnant. Remember that? Because he knew Mary, and he knew that it was totally out of character for her to be pregnant. He knew he hadn’t done it. They had had no relationships. Matthew 1:19, “Joseph, her husband, being a just man, not willing to make her a public example, was minded to divorce her privately.” Listen: Joseph had every right to divorce Mary if she had become pregnant by another person. And the Bible says, “Joseph, her husband, being a” – what kind of man? Just man, a righteous man – listen, he acted righteously in a desire to divorce a wife who had committed adultery. Now, he found out she hadn’t. The wonderful story was the Holy Spirit had conceived within her the Christ child. But, you see, it is a just thing to put away a wife for the cause of adultery, or for a wife to put away or divorce a husband for that cause – only that cause.

But in this text, 1 Corinthians, that is not the issue. For any other reason than that, there is no tolerance of divorce. “No,” says Paul, “apart from sexual sin, no divorce. If you’ve done it already, then you have to stay single the rest of your life, because that union, that one union was never broken. You’re stuck single all your life. Or, you can be reconciled to your husband.” And you can be sure in the case of real obedience, that they would do that second thing, if it was still possible. And then he reverses it in verse 11 and says, “Let not the husband put away his wife,” as well as the wife not putting away her husband. All right, what has he said? To be single is good; stay single if you have the gift. If you’re married to a Christian, stay married, and fulfill every aspect of marriage. The physical – we talked about it in verses 3 through 5 – don’t deprive one another sexually, fulfill every part of marriage, fulfill it to its limits. So we’ve seen the single people and those married to a Christian.

Group three, those married to an unbeliever who wants to stay, verses 12 to 14. Now what happens in this situation is let's say you've got a lady, and she says, "You know, I've become a Christian, and my husband is an out-and-out pagan. What do I do? Can I divorce him and marry a nice Christian man?" That's a fair question. And then further, look at this, looking back at chapter 6, verse 15; this is what Paul had been teaching. Listen: "Don't you know that your bodies are the members of" – what – "Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot, God forbid?" What? "Know ye not that he who is joined to a harlot is" – what – "one body, for two, saith He, shall be one flesh, but he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Now, remember what we said about that? The Christian is one with Christ, right? The Christian is a member of the body of Christ. If a Christian joins himself to a harlot, he defiles Christ, right? Can you see how the Corinthians would say, "Well, look, if I'm a member of Christ, if I'm one with the Lord, and I join myself to my pagan husband, am I defiling Christ?" Do you see? That reasoning is possible. "Wouldn't this be a defiling thing? If I would continue in this marriage, here am I, a member of Christ, joining myself to a member of Satan; am I not being defiled? Man, I've got to get out of this thing." And maybe some very conscientious people really felt that way. Maybe they really did.

What about a mixed marriage? What about it? Well, there's several things to think about in a mixed marriage. Number one, mixed marriages are forbidden when they can be prevented, right? Verse 39, at the end, says, "If you're going to marry, marry only in the Lord." So, the idea of a Christian marrying a non-Christian is totally in disobedience to Scripture. "But what happens if you're already married and one gets saved? What is he saying? Do I have to throw him out? What about it?" Well, look at verse 12, "To the rest" – that is, to those who are in mixed marriages – "speak I, not the Lord." In other words, I'm not quoting Christ anymore, there is no previous instruction in the gospels; not that it isn't revelation, it is. "To the rest speak I, not quoting the Lord, if any brother has a wife that believes not" – not a Christian – "but she is pleased to dwell with him, let him not divorce her." If you have an unsaved wife and she wants to stay, let her stay – let her stay. "And the woman" – verse 13 – "who has a husband that believes not, if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him." God doesn't want everybody getting saved and saying, "Well, good-bye, Charlie, that's it for us – go out and find myself a nice Christian fella." No, no.

You know, it was a bad thing in the early years of Christianity that the Christians were accused of destroying family relationships; a lot of pagan husbands really uptight about their wives getting saved. You know, for a woman to change religion without her husband was unthinkable, but it was happening. And one of the things I was reading in one of the ancient historians – Tertullian was commenting on it – one of the things that the pagan husbands made a big issue out of was the holy kiss. And maybe the early church got a little carried away with the holy kiss, and one husband said, "I don't want my wife going out spending all night at nocturnal convocations and pascal solemnities, creeping into prisons to kiss martyrs." So there were some things that were upsetting, and I'm sure some Christians who didn't behave wisely had some problems in their mixed marriages. It would be

difficult not to sympathize with some pagan husbands and pagan wives whose partners were not behaving as they should. But he says, “Look, if you have a partner who doesn’t believe but wants to stay, don’t divorce; let him stay – let him stay.” You say, ““But wait a minute, won’t I get defiled? Won’t this union defile me?” Well, let’s find out.

Look at verse 14, very interesting. “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.” Now, wait a minute here. You know something, folks? Not only is the believer not contaminated, but what happens? The very opposite. You say, ““Well, will I be defiled by the unbeliever?” No, he’ll be sanctified by you. Fantastic. Instead of a Christian being defiled or made unholy, the unbeliever is actually made holy. Sometimes I ask a person, I say, “Do you come from a Christian home?” “No – I’m the only Christian there.” Do you know how many Christians it takes to make a Christian home? One Christian. You say, ““What do you mean?” Everybody else in the house is sanctified by your presence. Did you know that? You say, ““John, what do you mean by sanctified? That’s a very strong word.” I know it’s a strong word. Sanctified means set apart, holy. You say, “But what’s it saying here?” Well, it isn’t saying that the guy’s automatically converted. It’s not saying if a husband doesn’t believe, he is saved anyway, just because he’s married to a Christian. No. No, it isn’t saying that, and it isn’t saying an unbelieving wife is saved automatically just because she’s married to a Christian husband. Well, what does the word sanctified mean?

Well, this is what we call matrimonial sanctification. And what do you mean by that? Well, that’s just a term to distinguish it from spiritual and personal sanctification. You become set apart unto God and holy when you believe in Christ, but just having been in a home or living in a home where somebody is a Christian has a sanctifying influence. Paul doesn’t mean that the unbeliever is automatically made a Christian by marriage, but what he does mean is that the marriage is benefited, and that everybody in the house reaps the benefit. For example, two people when they get married become what? One. If God blesses one of those, one of that one, then the other one is going to get some of the spillover, right? That’s all he’s saying. Hey, if you’re a non-Christian, and you’ve got a Christian mate, you ought to thank God, because your home is the recipient of the blessings of God. God pours out grace and mercy on that home, and just because you happen to be connected to that partner, you are the recipient of those things; short of salvation, but nevertheless far superior to living in a totally pagan home. Marriage to a Christian creates a relationship to God for the non-Christian; though while it is short of salvation, it is far superior to pagan life. Listen, one Christian in a home makes a Christian home, and graces that entire home.

After the service in the first hour, a gal came to me and she said, “You know, that message was just what I needed to hear.” She said, “I never understood that. You know,” she said, “we had in our entire home, mom, dad, all the kids, just one Christian - Grandma. Grandma use to talk about Christ, and everybody thought, ‘Oh, Grandma, cool it,’ you know? Nobody wanted to listen. And you know what happened? In the years that have passed, three out of the four children have come to Jesus Christ,

and all of them,” she said, “go back to the influence of Grandma.” You see, that kind of grace extended to the home through that one individual blessed of God will radiate to those who touch that life. Do you remember a conversation Abraham had with God in Genesis 18? Abraham said, “God, if I could find fifty righteous people in Sodom, would You spare the whole city?” God said, “Yeah.” Abraham came back and said, “If I could find 45, would You spare the city?” “Yeah.” “Um, twenty?” “Yep.” “Uh, God, if I could find ten, would You spare the city?” “Yep.” Couldn’t find ten, could he? But you know something? Ten righteous people could have been the means of the blessing of a whole city of people. Why? Because just being around God’s people means you are the recipient of some of His sanctifying blessing.

You know, you may be in a home where there’s only one Christian, and you know something? You are the beneficiary of the blessing of God upon that one person’s life, because you see, God sees Mom and Dad as one, and God sees Mom and Dad and kids as one unit, doesn’t He? And He cannot pour blessing on one independent of the rest, because in His eyes they are inextricably linked together. You know, if you’re not a Christian but your partner is, you ought to really thank God that you live in a home where God is at work, ’cause you are the beneficiary. You know, it’s like when your wife gets a huge inheritance, and you have nothing to do with it, you aren’t even related to the people, but man, do you cash in. It’s the same thing. You’re not even related to God, but you’re cashing in on the benefits that He’s pouring out on her. It’s a blessed thing for an unbeliever to be married to a Christian; let it stay that way. Christian, if that’s your – if your partner wants to stay, let him stay and sense the blessing of God. Who knows but what that sanctifying matrimonial grace might lead to saving grace, right?

Now, Paul goes a step further. Kind of supporting his point, he gives a little argument in reverse here. He says, “Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.” He’s saying, “If you were defiled by an unbeliever, then your children would be products who were defiled, right?” And apparently that’s what some of the Corinthians were saying. “You know, my husband is not saved. We’ve got to stop all sexual relations. You know, we might have a half-breed.” That’s right, a half Christian-half pagan child, see. Or, “What are we going – you know, we have – my husband is not a Christian. I can’t subject my children to that pagan influence.” Now wait a minute. “They’ll be defiled.” No, no. He says, “Look, here’s a simple fact.” Paul lays it down. “Now are your children” – what – “holy.” Your children – same word as sanctified, it should be translated the same as the earlier, sanctified. Your children are sanctified by this same grace, short of salvation, but nevertheless a kind of gracious life, and the blessing of God is attendant on them. And if it’s true that your children are sanctified and not unclean, then as reasoning goes backwards, it’s true, also, that your spouse is also sanctified. Don’t worry about being in a pagan home from that standpoint. If you’re the only Christian there, God says, “That’s a Christian home.” If you’re the only Christian there, God will pour out His blessing on you, and rather than you being defiled, they will be sanctified, both your spouse and your children. And pray to God that someday that matrimonial sanctification will lead to gracious and total sanctification when you put your faith in Jesus Christ. So if you’re married to an unbeliever and they want to stay,

let them stay – let them stay – because that’s to their benefit.

Fourth group – and this will pick up everybody that hasn’t been covered. Those married to unbelievers who want to go. Some of you have that problem. You’ve got an unbelieving partner, and he can’t stand your Christianity, and he wants out. Verse 15: “But if the unbelieving depart, fight him.” Is that what it says? “Don’t let him go; who will give him the gospel?” Is that what it says? It says what? “Let him go.” You say, “John.” Don’t talk to me, call up heaven, you know. It’s right there. “If the unbelieving depart, let him go.” In other words, this is where the unbeliever initiates the divorce, let him go. Don’t fight the divorce, don’t go to court and fight him – just let it go. If he wants out, let him go. The word depart refers again to divorce. It is a technical term for divorce. The unbeliever divorced the believer, and the believer is told, “Let him go, don’t fight it.” You say, “Don’t fight it? But what happens to me when he’s gone? I’m stuck for life. There’s no adultery, and I can’t handle that.”

No, you’re not stuck for life. Look at verse 15. “If the unbelieving depart, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under” what? “Bondage in such cases.” Do you know what? You are – what – free. Free from what? From bondage. The bondage of what? The only bondage that marriage has reference to, the bond of marriage; you’re free. Free to what? Free to remarry. That’s what he’s saying. You are free to remarry; you are no longer under bondage. And the word bondage is the word that’s used in Romans 7:2 when it talks about marriage, being bound by the law to a husband. Marriage is bondage, in Paul’s vocabulary and here he’s saying you are free from that marriage. You say, “Yes, but my, my, you certainly couldn’t remarry.” Why? It doesn’t say that. When God wants to say you can’t remarry, He says it. Verse 11: “If she departs out of a Christian marriage, she must remain” – what – “unmarried.” But here, “if the unbeliever departs and he gets the divorce, a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.” So, the marriage is ended. You see, desertion is like adultery in its effect; it disrupts the tie. Don’t fight it; let him go.

Well, you say, “Why let him go?” ’Cause God has called us to peace. You know, one of the benefits of being a Christian is to have a peaceful life – the peace of God – the gracious life. And, you know, there’s nothing that God needs less than constant fighting, tension, frustration, and turmoil in a home. A fighting, angry, quarreling home is not God’s objective, nor, people, is marriage primarily a foundation for evangelism. “Well, I’m going to hang on to that guy until he gets saved.” You know, you’ll just drive him right out. If he wants to go, let him go, let him leave rejecting Christianity, not hating you. But there’s going to be one objection, because some conscientious Christian is going to say, “Now, listen to me: if I do that, if I let him go, I lose the opportunity to see him saved. If I let him go, who’s going to bring him to Christ? I lose the opportunity to bring him to Christ and salvation.” So Paul deals with that in verse 16. He says this: “For what do you know, O wife, whether you’re going to save him? Or, how do you know, O man, whether you’re going to save your wife?” Don’t go on that premise, because you don’t know that.

He's not saying here, "Keep them so you can save them." He's saying, "Let them go, because you have no guarantee you will, and in the meantime you will destroy the peace that God intends to give. Let him go." Who saves people? Who does? God. And one thing that God has never really needed is quarrelsome, tension-filled, angry, hostile homes in which to save people. He doesn't really need that. He can do it without it. Let him go. Marriage is not primarily an instrument of evangelism, and to cling to a marriage which the unsaved is determined to end will only lead to terrible tension. It is God who saves. Paul answers the question, doesn't he? What if you're – what if you're single? Is that good? Good, be single. God's given you a gift, be single. Use it for His glory. But if you burn, get married. Well, what if you're married to a Christian, what do you do? Stay married to him. Fulfill that marriage to the very limits, physically and in every way. Well, what if You're married to an unbeliever who wants to stay? Let him stay, and grace his life and the life of your children with your blessing that comes from God. Well, what if he wants to go? Let him go because God has called you to peace. But who will witness to him? Don't worry about that, you have no idea that you're even the instrument; God knows, and God will do it in His way.

What is the upshot of all of this? I can only say it in closing like this: whatever God has given you as your marital state, accept it as His will, and maximize it for His glory. I can only think of one song, when I was kind of wrapping my thoughts up. You know what it was? It was this: my life is Yours, God, here's my response - have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way. Thou art the potter – what? I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will. That's all. If You've chosen to make me single, that's good. If You've chosen that I should marry, that's good. If You've chosen that I should be married to an unbeliever who wants to stay, that's good. If You've chosen that I should marry, and I'm married to an unbeliever who wants to go, and he goes, that's good, because I am free, and maybe God has another for me. I don't know what God wants for you. But I know this: that His will is purposeful, and will be fruitful as we abide in it. We're going to close in a minute with just prayer, but I want to say this. We assume when we teach the Word of God that the Spirit of God just sort of picks up the words and carries them to your heart, and that He sort of does a planting work.

We were out yesterday digging holes in the ground and sticking plants in, and I thought about the Holy Spirit, how He just takes the Word and plants it. And I know that He's done that in your life today, and maybe in response to what He's doing, you're feeling some things inside, and you're saying, "You know, I want to say, 'God, Your will, Your will, Your will.'" If you need to pray, seek counsel about that, maybe you just say, "Hey, I'm one of those unbelievers who needs to get on in. I've sensed some of the grace that kind of flows around Christians, and I'd like to be a part of it." Whatever the need of your life, if you're willing to say to the Lord, "You have Your way with me, whatever You want," we'd love to help you, pray with you, get you going in the right direction. Let God have His way in your life today that He might bear the fruit that He wants to bear through you to His glory. Thank You, Father, for, with clarity and practical insight, instructing us this morning. And we do pray that we would be obedient to Your will in all things, and we'll praise You in Jesus' name. Amen.

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