Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus' Teaching on Divorce, Part 5
Scripture: Matthew 19:1-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1-7
Code: 2340

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Matthew chapter 19 again as we are looking at Jesus teaching on the subject of divorce. And I had thought about perhaps taking a respite this Sunday, but was pressed in my heart to keep on, because what started out as a sermon has turned into a six part series and I really do want to get it finished, and so we are going to continue in our thoughts regarding our Lord's teaching in this matter. You know, I am reminded so many times of the marvel of the Holy Scripture. We had a seminar this week on expository preaching and we had about 20 pastors who came and we had a marvelous time working with them and just kind of working on the whole are of preaching. And one young man sat down with me at the table and he said, John, I have such a love for the Word of God. And he said, I have only been a Christian six years, but he said, I'm in the ministry and I can't get enough of the Word of God and he took out of his Bible three cards on which he had set up a reading schedule for himself, so that he was reading repetitiously the Word of God, each book over 30 times during the year and then he was reading flowing through the New Testament one full time each year. And then he had a set up where he was reading through the Old Testament as well each year. And he said, you know, I just want you to know that since I began to do this, it actually has changed my entire life. And we talked about that the Word of God touches on every dimension of living. It gives us God's clear teaching wherever we need God's clear teaching and where the Bible leaves things unsaid, it provides a foundation which the Spirit of God can use to apply a direct kind of leading in an individual's life. And so I was reminded again, just to affirm in my own heart, the tremendous treasure of the Word of God. Of knowing that we have a chart and a compass and an answer book. A place to go to find out what we need to know. And one of the subjects with which the Bible deals is the subject of divorce. It is a very important subject today. And we have been looking at Matthew 19 verses 1 to 12 and hearing the teaching of our Lord himself on this subject. And I want us to return to that for at least an introduction and then to anther passage which we'll look at in a moment.

Now as you come to chapter 19, you are reminded in the two first versus that the Lord is finishing his ministry in Galilee. He has closed the great teaching of chapter 18 on the childlikeness of the believer. He has finished the Galilean ministry and now he begins to move south, it's only a few months until he will be crucified. And as he moves to the south, he crosses the Jordan River to the east and goes into an area known as the beyond or the word *peran* from which we get Perea, and we find his Perean ministry. We have seen his Galilean ministry and now his Perean ministry. He teaches. He heals people, the crowds follow him, very much like in Galilee. And among the crowd, it seems, inevitably are his enemies the Pharisees. And so as we pick it up in verse 3, we find an

encounter between the Lord and the Pharisees and the subject is divorce. And it is out of that encounter that our Lord's teaching proceeds.

The Pharisees came to him testing and saying to him, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause, now that is what I call the attack. They don't want an answer, they want to discredit Jesus. They want him to articulate his hard line, God never intended divorce view, and so alienate himself from the people. They also know that he's in the territory of Herod Antipas who already beheaded John the Baptist for his views of divorce and they think maybe they can even have Jesus eliminated. So they're after him. So, in verse 3 is the attack. In verses 4-6 is the answer. And he doesn't give a personal answer, wisely, so that any anger would have to be diverted from him to God. He answers with Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, that God created a man and a woman and no spares in the original creation and therefore, he was obviously making a statement that two people are to be married and that's the limit. And the he talked about cleaving, they should be glued to each other. God ordained that they would be one flesh that's the indivisible number and what God has put together, let no man divorce. And so he puts the burden of proof on God and says, if you are going to argue with this, your argument is not with me, it's with God. God said no divorce. That was not the divine ideal. Now out of the answer comes the argument in verse 7. They respond by saying, then why did Moses command a bill of divorce, to divorce your wife. What is the bill of divorce then if that was not God's intention?

And then you have the affirmation in verses 8 and 9, where Jesus simply reaffirms the Old Testament standard that Moses permitted a bill of divorcement under one condition. And that one condition is adultery, which comes under the term fornication in verse 9. And there he says, if you put away and divorce your wife for anything other than fornication or adultery, you cause her to become an adulteress and so forth and so on. So the only Old Testament permission was giving in cases of adultery. Hosea gives us the example of restoration in an adulteress union where there is a willingness on the part of the adulteress. But where there is an unwilling evil partner divorce is a concession or permission of grace to that innocent party who cannot bring about a reconciliation. So what the Lord affirms then in answer to their question, their question again, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause, Jesus' answer is what? No.

It is no. Now look at the appropriation in verses 10 -12 and just remind yourself of what we learned last week. The disciples response as they appropriated the teaching to themselves was, it's better to be single if you can't get out of it. And Jesus response to that in verse 11 is yes, but not everybody can handle being single. Not everybody can receive this saying, what saying? If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. Not everybody can handle being single. In verse 12 he says, who can? Those who are congenitally born with an inability to have a relationship with the opposite sex. Those who have been made that way by castration or some other thing done by man. Or those who have chosen singleness because they are going to devote themselves in a special way for the kingdom of heaven's sake. And so he says, look, you can't just take the idea of a commitment

in marriage being a lifelong commitment and say, if it's that hard to get out of, I'm not getting in. Not everybody can handle that. That's not the right response. The right response is to make the commitment. Unless you have a congenital reason or unless you have been injured in some way or unless you decide because you are calling yourself apart to the kingdom of God and you feel gifted by God for that to stay single. But certainly, you are not to avoid marriage just because it's a binding relationship you want to get out of. That's a illegitimate reason. So, the Lord exalts marriage and he says, divorce for only one reason, but that's no reason not to get married. Because not everybody can handle being single, it's a worse problem for most people than being married is because of the temptation.

And so the Lord has given us very clear teaching, marriage is an honorable thing, it's for life. Stay married, divorce only in one kind of situation, he says. And when the disciples say, then we'll stay single. He says, no don't stay out of it because it takes a lifelong commitment, get in it for that reason unless you have very clear reason not to and unless it's a physical deformity, it should be because you are staying single for the glory and the advance of the kingdom. Very clear teaching.

Now keep this in mind. You say, well, this doesn't deal with a lot of problems. This doesn't deal with what happens when you come to the Lord and your background is all fouled up and what happens when you are living with somebody and what happens if you have been married five times and now who is your wife and all of this. This doesn't deal with any of that. You're right. You are right, it doesn't. You see, Jesus is just establishing the divine ideal and that doesn't need to deal with exceptions, you understand? That doesn't need to deal with other extraneous issues. Jesus is affirming his Messiahship and he affirms his Messiahship by lining up with the clear Word of the living God. Which is to say to the people, I speak for God and so he doesn't deal in a lot of other things, he stays true to the revelation of God. He says in Matthew 5, I have come to fulfill the law, not to alter the law, not to eliminate the law, not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, and so he affirms the divine ideal. And does not deal with all kinds of exceptions. Now also keep in mind that he's talking to a Jewish group of people who have been living all their life long under the economy of Moses. That is they have been circumscribed to one degree or another to their interpretation of mosaic law. And so they are in a mosaic environment and he is simply stating for them, the intended ideal of God giving to his special people Israel. You say, well then what do you do with all the exceptions? And that's what I know has been on your mind over the last four or five weeks. You've been saying, but, but, but, you can't just keep saying that ideal thing again. I'm not there. I have already gone beyond that, or I have already had divorces in my background or I have been living with somebody and when I became a Christian I have had several wives and several husbands and whose am I now and what do I do and can I marry and should I? And what's going on here?

Jesus doesn't get into that, but fortunately, Paul does. And if you will open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 7, we'll look together at Paul. Jesus gave the divine ideal and Paul had to handle the mess that was going on in the world and try to make application of that divine ideal to the chaos of life. Now

keep this in mind, Paul ministered to a Gentile community that had not been circumscribed to the law of Moses, they had not been raised to keep the law of Moses, so their life was literally a mess from beginning to end.

There was much less chaos in the Jewish community because of the Mosaic legislation than there was in the gentile one where there was no mosaic legislation at all. And I believe 1 Corinthians 7 is Paul's commentary on the teaching of Jesus, all right? It is Paul's commentary on the teaching of Jesus about marriage and divorce. He interacts with the Lords teaching, for example, verse 10, unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, and now he is reaching back and saying, look, I am going to tell you something about being married that isn't just from me, the Lord already said this, so he's reaching back, intersecting, interfacing touching what the Lord taught. And then in verse 12, to the rest speak I, not the Lord. Now he says, this is something new, the Lord didn't say this, I'm not longer quoting the Lord, he's not disclaiming inspiration, friends, he's putting himself on an equal plane with the Lord himself. He is saying, the Lord didn't say this, but I'm saying it and the effect of which is to say, it's just as important as if the Lord said it. And you might say, you mean to say what Paul said is equally important as to what the Lord said? That's right, because what the Lord said came from God and what Paul said came from God the Holy Spirit, right? And there are no degrees. That's why I have had problems with red-letter Bibles. The red letters aren't more important than any other letters. If you want to have a red-letter Bible, that's okay, just know that. Just know they are not more important, because when Paul says, the Lord says this and now I say this like the Lord said it or when he says, the Lord didn't say this, but I'm saying it all he's doing is putting himself on an equal plane with the Lord and at the end of the chapter in verse 40 he says, I know I have the Spirit of God. I'm not just giving you my opinions. I know I have the Spirit of God. Even though verse 25 says, I have no direct command of the Lord, I am giving you my judgment and I know it is from the Spirit of God. So Paul then is intersecting with what the Lord taught and carrying it a little bit further to cover some of the problems, some of the issues, some of the struggles that he was facing. Now let me just give you a little bit of an idea background wise so you will get a feeling for what he had to deal with. And it is very much like our own society. All right, Paul went into a situation like the Corinthian situation. The verb, to *corinthianize* in the Greek language meant to commit sexual sin. SO you get a little idea of what Corinth was like, right? It was a rotten, wretched, sinful, vile place. And when you wanted to talk about somebody being a lecherous, evil, vile, lewd, lascivious, adulteress person, you called them a Corinthian. So that's the kind of society that little church was born in. Immoral, vile wicked kind of life. And they were involved in worshiping all kinds of deities. I've been to the ruins of Corinth. I have seen literally gross replicas of human organs hanging all over the place. It was definitely a place where deviant kind of worship occurred, which was not uncommon in pagan systems of worship.

So a church is born in that place by the wonderful ministry of the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul as you know, and now, these people are coming to Christ, but when they come to Christ they are not coming out of a circumscribed conformed background of understanding of what is moral and

what is ethical. They are coming to Christ in absolutely chaotic marital status. I'll give you some kind of an insight into some of it. Much of the population of that part of the Roman world was slaves, right? Slaves. Now the empire contained many, many slaves and it was very clear that many, many of them became Christians. Some people believe the majority of the church was slaves. Marriage in the strict sense did not even exist for slaves. Slaves were like animals. A farmer does not marry his cows, he mates them. He doesn't marry his horses, he mates them. And they didn't marry slaves, they mated them. They had this thing they called *contiburnium.* And *contiburnium* basically has to do with tent companionship. The slave owner looked over the slaves and mated them off to have them produce whatever slaves he wanted as best he could ascertain strengths and so forth, there were never ceremonies, they just entered into a live in relationship, very much like contemporary society in America, live in kind of relationships.

By the way, this week, I happen to find a certificate made up in sort of legal fashion or quasi legal fashion where two people can consent to each other to have sexual relationships under the provision that neither one of them is obligated to the other in any way, shape, or form, and it's sealed and it has places where you can sign, date it and have it notarize. But this is the kind of thing here, they didn't even that that. There was nothing. They just moved into the tents and lived together. Now let's assume that this slave has had different masters and he has different *contriburnium* relationships. And all of a sudden he comes to Christ and now he's a Christian and somebody stands up and teaches him what the Lord says about one man for one woman for life. No divorce, no fornication all these things and he looks at himself and he looks back and he thinks about all these various woman that he may have spawned children with , as it were and the one that he's now living with and his question is what do I do? Who is my wife? Where am I? And that is a very real issue.

Now when you move one step beyond the slave, you come to the sort of common people in the roman culture and they were married under a term called usus, u-s-u-s, and it had to deal with the basic common law concept. If you lived with a woman for a year, you were considered to be legally married by common law, so people tended not to get married at all. They just tended to experiment and after one year, it became legal. I think in America, it used to be 7. I don't even think anybody cares anymore. So common law marriage was another way, so what happens if say you become a Christian. You have a woman, you've been living with her three years, you have never married her. What are you going to do? Is she your wife or isn't she, and what if you had three other common law wives before that or what if you have one in this town, and three in another town. It's very much like a missionary who goes to a foreign country, translates the Bible, wins the tribe of people to Christ only to find out, of course, in the process that they all have 8 or 10 wives. Now that's the kind of thing that Paul was dealing with in Corinth.

Now there as a third kind of marriage in the inconsistent marital approaches of the Romans in what was called *coemptio in manum* and this was the sort of thing where you buy the woman from the father. The old tradition of marriage by sale. In other words, if you are a father and you have a

beautiful daughter, but a crummy business, you understand? You sell your daughter and bail out your business, and so there was much of that, selling off of daughters into marriage. And so then there was, for the noble families, what was called *confarreatio* and *confarreatio* was the term for the noble sophisticated fancy kind of marriage ceremony. It involved exchanging rings and by the way, that's where we get ours, ours is an adaptation of the Roman *confarreatio* system. And the ring is on the third finger of the left hand because one of the roman supposed wise men, sages taught that there is a nerve running from that finger to the heart, and that's why you wear your ring there. They got together and they worshiped and said prayers to Jupiter and Juno. They exchanged rings. They had a cake, would you believe. They wore veils. They had music. They held their right hands. They had wreaths. The whole shot and it all filtered into the Roman Catholic marital system which eventually came out of Roman Catholicism through the reformation into Protestantism and we still have remnants of it now. So you have all of these kind of strange marriage situations, only the fourth of which would constitute a marriage as we understand it with a verbal and written covenant before people and so forth and so on. And so the question that comes to Paul or the Corinthians is what in the world do we do with all this hodge podge of people coming to Christ, who do they belong too? Do they have a right to remarry if they are now single? Should they stay living with the one they are living in say a contubernium relationship? What do we do with the mishmash of marriage and so forth?

Now you add to that the fact that divorce was rampant. I read, I think William Barkley notes that in one of the historical documents, there was one lady getting married for the 27th time and she was the 26th wife of her husband to be. That will give you a little idea of how the divorce rate existed in those times. People were involved in homosexuality, they were involved in polygamy. They were involved in concubinage. One of the roman writers, Seneca says that men have women, have wives for the housekeeping and the raising of children and concubines for physical pleasure. And you have all of this chaos and to add to that there was a women's liberation movement. Jerome Carcopino writes about it. He says, "some were not content to live their lives by their husband's side. They carried on a totally separate life unto themselves." And Juvenile says, "what modesty can you expect in a woman who wears a helmet. Hates her own sex and delights in feats of strength?" And Juvenile says that woman were going bare breasted through the streets with spears sticking pigs and climbing posts. It's not my kind of woman. But you have all of that kind of stuff. And Juvenile also says that, "she lords it over her husband, before long she vacates her home, flits from one house to another wearing out her bridal veil." So really, here come these people to Christ and what do you do with them?

I mean, talk about trying to unscramble the omelet, this is really it. Well, the Corinthians didn't know what to do either so you know what they did, they wrote Paul a letter and that letter is alluded to in verse 1 of chapter 7. It says, now concerning the things about which you wrote unto me. Now that sets up the chapter. He's going to answer their questions, right? But you know what he does, he doesn't tell us the questions. He just gives the answers. And if you are ever going to understand 1 Corinthians 7 you got to figure out the questions, and that's the fun of it. We got the answers, all we got to do is come up with the questions. They ask the questions and he gives them answers and if we

take the answers and go backwards, I think we can figure out the questions. But what he does in this chapter is cover all the categories, I'm telling you, he covers every category here. And I think I am seeing this in a new or a fuller way that I have ever seen it before and in today's message and next Sunday's as we complete it, oh ye of little faith.

See, that's the adventure of preaching folks, I come here to hear what I'm going to say. I can't always tell. You put it all in and it scrambles around and the Spirit of God, that's the way the Spirit works through the gift of preaching and it's kind of exciting that way, but apparently, they are asking these questions, and Paul is answering them and we can understand the questions if we understand the answers, and believe me, he covers all the questions. He questions about single people, married people, people married to believers, people married to unbelievers, people who are already divorced and now they are single, do they have a right to remarry. People who are virgins, fathers with daughters that are virgins, should they give them in marriage or not. People whose husbands or wives have died, should they remarry or not, he covers all those questions in this chapter. Now let's approach the first question that appears in the first, really the first seven verses. And we'll even look into verse 8. Here is what I believe the question is. Is physical sex unspiritual? That's the question. Now you are not going to see that question there, but you are sure going to see that question there, but you are sure going to hear that question behind the scenes as you listen to the answer. You see what had happened was this, and you can imagine this, you come out of this terrible background of sexual chaos. I mean, you have been worshiping a pagan god right? And how do you worship a pagan god when you go to a pagan temple? Well, you may have been involved with a pagan prostitute. You may have been involved with a temple priestess. I mean, you have got a gross kind of life style, multiple marriage, multiple divorce, no marriage at all, all kinds of stuff going on, no restraints and a society that allowed everything, a society that advocated homosexuals. A society that advocated adultery and fornication, you name it and they were promoting it. And so you are coming out of that background and all of a sudden you come to Jesus Christ and your mind is filled with all this garbage, see, and apparently, someone had gotten up in the Corinthian church, would be my guess and given them a lesson on the fact that all sex is unspiritual. And you can kind of understand why someone might have a problem with that, even married folks who get married and maybe they have gotten married and they are Christians and they look at each other and all they can think about is all the garbage kind of relationships they have had in the past and they can't even enjoy the relationship they could have together that was honored by God because they are so cluttered up with the fifth of the past and some of you folks may have experienced that same thing and so somebody comes along and says, all sex is evil. It's all bad. It's not spiritual. If you want to be spiritual, abstain. And it seems as though they ask the question, is physical sex really unspiritual. And Paul's answer comes beginning in verse 1.

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Now the phrase touch a woman is the key. It is a euphemism. And it means to have sexual intercourse. That's what it means. It's used such in Genesis 20 verse 6, Proverbs chapter 6 verse 29. He says, it's good not to have a sex relationship. It's good,

it's good. It's okay, *kalos*, it's beneficial, it's honorable, it's all right. It's okay to be celibate, is what he's saying, It's okay. It's not wrong not to marry. It's okay to be single. It's okay to be celibate, he needs to say that. Celibacy is a good thing, it's an honorable thing, it's an excellent thing. But I'll tell you something about it he says, for most folks it's pretty tough. Pretty tempting, verse 2, nevertheless, he says, to avoid *porneia* sexual sin, to avoid sexual sin, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband.

In other words, if your celibacy is going to cause you to sexually sin. If your celibacy is going to cause you to commit sex sins either physically or in your mind, whatever, if your singleness is going to do that to you then you ought to have your own partner, that's the point. It's okay to be celibate, but it's not okay to be celibate if it causes you to sin. So, the idea of the swinging single life is not okay. The idea of totally abstaining for a sexual relationship that's okay. We learned it's okay, maybe you have a congenital reason for that or maybe you had a physical thing happen to you that caused that or maybe as we saw in Matthew 19:12, maybe you have decided to be single for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven and that's okay. In fact as we shall see a little bit latter, it's even a better than just okay. It's good. It's great.

It may be best. It is best for some. So, he says, in answer to your question, celibacy is good. I don't want to say it's bad. It's good, because you see, if Paul says, oh, no, no, you should never be celibate, then all the people who feel they want to be celibate all their life for the sake of the kingdom are going to feel like they are disobedient, so he can't urge it on everybody. So he says, okay, it's good, it's good, but if it's going to cause you temptation and you are going to get into sexual sin, they you ought to have your own wife and your own husband. I love the world own, just underline that. That's monogamy friends, just have your own wife and your own husband and that's it. And the style of life among the Corinthians made it harder to be single than married.

I mean, here were these people who said, we will be celibate for the cause of the Lord. And they were living in the midst of a sexually made society where it would be just nothing but constant temptation. Celibacy is good, marriage is more common. Celibacy is tempting. Don't stay single if it's going to cause you to commit sexual sin. Verse 3, he says this, and I'll tell you one thing, there is no place for celibacy inside a marriage. Let the husband render unto the wife her due, or the debt, and likewise, also the wife unto the husband. In other words, if you get married friends, then there is no place for celibacy. It doesn't belong in a marriage. That is the debt, now what does that mean, the obligation. When you got married, you became obligated to meet the physical need of your partner. That's one place where Scripture affirms mutual submission. Verse 4, the wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband and likewise, also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. In other words, you gave up the right to your own body. It belongs to your partner and it is your debt. And so verse 3 is in the present imperative, let the husband continually keep on rending to his wife the debt and likewise also the wife, implied keep in rendering the debt she owes her husband. In other words, the sexual relationship in marriage is to be a continual giving, a continual submission unto one

another, and believe me when this does not happen it destroys marriages.

It is as one old writer said a blessed and bold intoxication and in the midst of it there is ag rowing kind of intimacy of two lives that are blended together from that physical dimension and all the other dimensions into an unbreakable bond of love. And it belongs in a marriage. A marriage is no place for celibacy. So you are not more spiritual if you abstain in your marriage. And I want to make a point of this, because there is some teaching going around today that you can gain a greater amount of spirituality by abstaining from physical relationships in your marriage. Don't you believe that? Because what happens in verse 5 ought to be brought, as over against that teaching, stop depriving one another. Except it be with consent, that is mutual consent, for a brief time to give yourselves to prayer and come together again that Satan tempt you not for your lack of self-control. In other words, if you try to abstain from each other for some spiritual purpose, you'll not only not accomplish a spiritual one, you will accomplish an evil one because you will put the person in the place of being open to the solicitation to temptation by Satan himself.

You don't want to do that, so under the guise of supposed spirituality, you are going to create temptation. And people say, well, how long should we abstain or how long is being, well recently this teaching is going around that we should abstain for spiritual purposes 14 days a month. Now some marriages would be literally destroyed by that. They would be devastated by that because everyone is different and people's needs are different. The only thing the New Testament says is that we are to give up totally ourselves the partner. Now, when people are advocating this 14 days a month abstinence kind of thing as a means to spiritual development, it is in fact a means to satanic temptation, in most cases, but what they are doing is going back you see, to Leviticus 15, and I'll just give it to you quickly. In Leviticus 15, as the writer Moses is describing ceremonial law, it says that when a woman goes through her monthly cycle for a period of 7 days, she is ceremonial unclean. Now that does not mean she's immoral. It is not immoral to have a normal God given cycle. It's not an issue of morality or ethics or spirituality or anything, it is ceremonial and all the ceremonies were, were signs and symbols, not realities, you understand that? They were signs and symbols not realities, but for that 7 day period she was ceremonial unclean. And so at the end of that, she needed another 7 days of purification where she would go through certain washings and certain ceremonies and then on the 15th day she would take two turtle doves or two pigeons and give them to the priest who would sacrifice them on the alter and therefore there would be a fitting cleansing and then she could enter into worship God.

Now all that is meant to say is this, you can't approach God when you are unclean. But God was not really driving at just physical things. He was driving at a clean what? Heart. Just like in circumcision. Just like in circumcision. It was not that God wanted only circumcision, but that every time a Jewish baby was circumcised the Jewish people had to think back through the fact that that, as that was being done, so the heart needed to be circumcised as well, the cutting away of all evil. So it is not to say that woman was morally unclean or spiritually unfit. But it was an outward demonstration of the

inward reality that you cannot approach God unless your heart is clean. It's the same as the Old Testament sacrifices, were the Old Testament sacrifices able to take away sin? No. And neither was any kind of washing or cleansing, ceremonial cleansing, neither was that able to fit people for God. Bu tit was a symbol of that. And here was a woman who having gone through that would have to take a two week period to cleanse and go through washings and all of this, go offer these two birds before she could enter God's presence and God was thereby saying, I want clean people in my presence. I want clean people. And once the new covenant came then Christ came finished the work on the cross, gave us a new heart, cleansed us from the inside and now, we can have boldness to enter into the Holy of Holies, right?

So we cannot advocate that we need the same 14 days of purification, now the point comes because it says in Leviticus that if the husband has a relationship with his wife during that period, he becomes ceremonial unclean and he has to go through a certain cleansing process. That doesn't mean it's wrong for him to have that relationship, that doesn't mean that at all. It doesn't mean that it's immoral for him to have that relationship. It doesn't mean that it's unspiritual for him to have that relationship, all it means is, that if he does do that, God has ordained a certain ceremony for him to go through, which will act as a reminder, and by the way, this probably happened very frequently, because I'm quite confident that the Hebrews didn't take that as 14 days a month of abstinence. So it was very common for them to be going through this cleansing. I really believe that God gave this particular cleansing, connected with that act of relationship between husband and wife, because it would be so common that they would commonly be going through the cleansing and commonly reminding themselves that God must be approached by those that have clean hands and a pure heart. It was only symbolic.

And my question to the person who advocate the 14 days of abstinence is then when the 14 days are up then you are going to have to get that woman to find herself two turtle doves, one priest and a temple somewhere to make a sacrifice, because either the cross eliminates all of it or none of it. Now when you come to the New Testament you don't have anything like that. When you come to the New Testament, the text says, you keep on giving yourself to each other and don't stop doing that unless by mutual consent you to prayer over some issue that is a heart rending issue and that becomes a non-concern for you, but other than that, you give yourself to each other or you are not going to get more spiritual folks, you are going to give Satan an opportunity to tempt you and foul up your marriage.

Now, we have got to see the end of the old covenant, folks. There were a lot of ceremonies in the old covenant that we don't maintain today and if you are going to pick up that one, then you are going to have a lot of other baggage with it, friends, along with a bunch of rams and lambs and trying to find the high priest and the temple isn't going to be easy, since the last one we know of was destroyed in 70 AD. But you see, when you try start trying to take old covenant ceremonial symbols and drag them into the new, you are doing exactly what the apostle Paul said in Colossians not to do. He said, these

things are a shadow and a substance, but the reality is Christ and once the reality is come, don't let anybody bind you to the shadows, that's all. And even then, it wasn't a moral issue, it was only ceremonial. A man could have a relationship with his wife whenever, obviously he has the sense to make it a right and honorable one and one that will be mutually enjoyed. And so the text is answering the question, is sex unspiritual, of course, not, God invented it. God designed it and God intended for it to be the fulfillment of man and there is no fulfillment in life that can even match it. Marvelous thing. And we are not called upon in the Bible to abstain from it. We are called upon in the Bible to enjoy it to the absolute fullest extent so that we can build together a tremendous and profound intimacy that will last a lifetime. So not to do it is to give Satan an advantage.

Now, look in verse 6, having said that, he says, this, I speak this because of my awareness, permission, having to do with the idea of awareness, not by commandment. He says, I'm not commanding people to be married. I'm just aware of the fact that most folks need that. He says, what I know about life tells me that it's okay to be celibate, but to avoid fornication, you ought to have your own husband or your own wife and once you get married don't let anybody lay some trip upon you about abstinence.

Hebrews 13:4 says, marriage is honorable and the bed is undefiled. The bed is undefiled. It's a holy sacred place. And so he says, I'm telling you this because I'm aware of these things. And then he says this in verse 7, I would that all men were even as I myself. I mean, he says there is a sense in that I wish everybody was single and celibate. He was celibate, now he may have been married, as some say, being in the Sanhedrin indicates you had to be married. His wife may have died. She is definitely a forgotten woman if she did, at least in terms of biblical revelation. But he's not single and he's saying, I would that all men were even as I myself. And he says this because he realizes that in being single there is a great freedom. There is a great liberty. For example, look over at verse 29. He says, time is short. It remains that they that have wives be as though they have none, they that weep as though they weep not, they that rejoice as though they rejoice not. In other words, you have to sort of turn away from the things of life and because the time is short, focus on the divine things. And then in verse 32, he says, I would have you without anxiety, I wish you were carefree like I am. There is something about being single. There is a carefree reality there. You don't have to care for a wife and children and all the things that come with it. It's an anxiety free relationship in that sense. You say, well, I'm single and I'm not anxiety free, well that maybe a good indication that you ought to be looking toward marriage. And if you are struggling with your physical desires and single then you better maybe lower your standard from waiting for the local Adonis to show up and take some guy who has got a heart for God and you guys better take a woman that has a heart for God too. Instead of fighting through the jungle of your own temptation when God would fulfill and enrich your life with someone who has the same values that you do in Jesus Christ and quit restricting yourself to some sill standards that the world has established. Now the gift that God gives, he gives to some. Look at verse 7, I would that all men were even as I myself. I would that all men were even as I myself, but every man hath is proper gift of God. One after this manner and another after that. He says, look, I'm

not going to argue with God's gift. I don't want people who need to be married trying to live a celibate life, at least not traveling in my missionary team. That doesn't help. I just know that God wants some people single, some people married and if God wants you married, then get married. You out to have your own wife.

And you know, since last week I got a list a mile long of folks who said, I'm available. I am trying to avoid getting into sort of a matchmaking deal, but I do have some things in mind and I will be contacting those of you that are involved. But there is a certain blessedness in being single. There is a great blessedness in being married, depends on the gift of God. Now I believe in verse 7 that there is definitely a gift of God in this regard, in other words, God suits some people for marriage and some people for singleness, and the reason to be single, obviously is because you feel you can handle that, it doesn't not pose a temptation to you and you feel you can be single and give a sole and concentrated heart attention to the advance of the kingdom. Look further at verse 32, he that is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord. He that is married cares for the things of the world, how he may please his wife and he's divided, and to the virgin, the unmarried woman, verse 34, cares for the things of the Lord that she maybe holy both in body and in spirit but she that is married cares for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. In other words, you get some baggage when you get married. You say, well, I need that. That's right, and if you do, you would get married. But if you can stay single and it doesn't pose temptation to you, then you have a marvelous thrilling, God given opportunity to give your life to the advancement to the kingdom of God. Don't just stay single because you don't want to make commitment and then try to fight your way all your life with temptation. Make a commitment to stay single because you believe God has gifted you in that area, you don't need the fulfillment physically that marriage brings and you can see yourself totally and utterly devoted to Jesus Christ.

That's a marvelous thing. It's even went a step further apparently whoever gave this message in the Corinthian church got so many people stirred up that some of the fathers were reluctant to give their daughters in marriage and they may have been trying to hold their daughters back from marriage, which would have been a terrible frustration to their daughters. I think Paul refers to that in verse 36, if a man thinks he behaves himself unseemly towards his virgin, this is a father daughter, if she pass the flower of her age and need so require let him do what he will, he sinneth not, let him marry. Here is some guy, he's got this beautiful daughter who wants to get married and he says, no you are for the Lord, I am going to keep you single for the Lord and she is saying, I don't want to be single for the Lord, daddy, I want Albert.

And he's giving her this spirituality trip and all she wants is a husband and kids and so Paul says, look, let them marry. Somebody had given them some kind of deal, hadn't they, on abstinence, which was out of line with God's truth. It's great to be married if that's what God has called you too. I mean, I wouldn't trade all the joys of a loving wife, and blessed children and family and I mean, that's life to me. But I also know there are some people who are single to the glory of God and they wouldn't trade

either and Paul was one of them. He was one of them.

Look at 1 Corinthians 9 verse 5 just as a comparison, Paul here sort of reaffirming his rights as an apostle I guess you could say and he says, we have some rights as apostles and one of them is, have we no right to lead about a sister, a wife? As well as the other apostles and as the brethren of the Lord and Peter. He says, look, if I wanted too, I have a right to get married, and this out to say something about the priesthood too, folks, of the Roman Catholic Church, it isn't more spiritual to be single. It isn't more spiritual at all. He says, I could be married like Peter. Peter was married, folks. I don't know what kind of problems that causes for catholic people but he was married. We have already met his wife's mother in the gospels and here we are reminded that he's got a wife. I would love to meet his kids and I will in heaven someday and I think it will be a very curious occasion. But nonetheless, here you have two great apostles, Peter and Paul, Peter was married and Paul was not and maybe that illustrates the whole point, and God used Peter in a mighty way. Although, Peter apparently didn't travel as much, it may have been because of the encumbering of that family. Paul had that freedom, that unique freedom, but he says, look, I have a right to lead about a sister as a wife, just like everybody else. That's a right and a privilege that I have. Marriage is a wonderful and honorable and God blessed thing and singleness is only for folks who can be single for the glory of God, not for just the sake of lack of commitment or because they have set some worldly standard for who they would marry and nobody comes up to that standard. BY the way, there is a couple footnotes in this verse that I can't resist. Two things that Paul tells us about a wife. She needs to be led and she ought to be a sister. That's a wonderful affirmation of what the Bible says about the male responsibility to be the head and lead his wife. And I don't mean to put a ring in her nose and drag her around, I think what he's saying there is to give her guidance and direction.

That's God's intention and not only is she to be one who will follow, one who would be led, one who understands that helpmeet role, but she is to be a sister. That is in Christ and he has a right to that. The question then, I think in the first few verses of 1 Corinthians is, is sex unspiritual and the answer is what? No. It's okay if you don't get into that. It's okay if you are a virgin till you go to heaven, it's okay. It's honorable. It's wonderful if God gifts you for that and calls you for that and sets you apart for the kingdom. If you have been formally married and now you are single again maybe through death or divorce, you are either widowed or divorce and you have every reason to be single because you have lost your partner, then you ought to think first of all, hey, maybe God does want me single, that's honorable, that's okay, that's good from here on out you can be celibate and glorify God. But marriage also glorifies God.

It just depends on what your gift is. That's the first question. I'm going to give you the second question. Now listen should the formerly married remarry, do they have that right. Now the answer to that is going to come next week. I just wanted to put that in so you would come. Let's bow in prayer. The Word of God is so practical and, Father, we are so thankful that it speaks to life, touches us right where we live. The divine genius of its truths, oh how it penetrates our hearts. It knows us. We know it

was written by God because it searches out the secret places of our hearts. Thank you for what you have taught us today and reminded us of. The sanctity, the wonder, the beauty of marriage, the sanctity, the wonder, the beauty of singleness, for the glory of God, by the giftedness of the Spirit, for the sake of the kingdom. Father, my prayer is that every one of us would understand what you have called us too. Be it to be single, that we might not be encumbered by the anxiety of the world, but free to care for the things of the Lord, to be single for the sake of the advance of the kingdom. We thank you for what we have learned about marriage too, that it's good. That everyone should have their own partner to avoid sinning and in that union there should be continual giving of one to the other. Because this closes out Satan's ability to tempt us in that very vulnerable area and if we can just be fulfilled in that area, we can sustain a lifelong, happy, thrilling, intimate love relationship, so bless the marriages. Bless the single folks, and we pray for those who are in the crossroads asking the question, do I have a right to marry again, should I marry again? Should I marry for the first time? Has God called me to singleness? We pray that you will answer the cry of their hearts as well. And for those, Father, who desire to marry, but have not found the right partner, would you bring to them that right person. That one that you would have to share the values of the faith and the love of Christ with, a sister, a brother who may together become one in you. We thank you for all who are gathered today and we pray on this special day there might be a great sharing of love and affection, that you might be the center of it all. We pray, in Christ's name, Amen.

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