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

Jesus' Teaching on Divorce, Part 6
Scripture: Matthew 19:1-12; 1 Corinthians 7:8-40
Code: 2341

Let's take our Bibles and open them to the passage we've been looking at now, this is our sixth week looking at Matthew chapter 19 and examining our Lord's teaching on the subject of divorce. I just want to touch very briefly on Matthew 19 and then spend our time this morning in I Corinthians chapter 7.

Now, there are some characteristics of the early church, the church of the New Testament, that are different than the church today. They had Apostles. They had prophetsunique to their time. It was a time when the revelation of God was just unfolding. There was a closeness to the life of Christ. There was a zeal. There was a fire. There was a passion. There was a dynamic purity. There was a simplicity of life. There was a profuse kind of testimony reaching out to their world that maybe is different than today.

But while there are some different things and maybe some things that we'd like to recapture, there are some things about that early church that are identical to today. There are some things that they possessed that we also possess, namely the same message, the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit and the same Word of God with the same teaching, the same principles, and the same demands and blessings for our life. That doesn't change. And so, as we go to the Word of God and we touch life in the time of our Lord and life in the time of Paul the Apostle, we must hear what they say and understand that it is a direct truth for this generation. One of the really tragic things that happens in our time in the church is that people take the cultural standards and try to back them into the Bible...and eliminate anything in the Scripture that doesn't fit the way we think we need to live today. We can't do that to the Word of God without desecrating its purity. We must hear what it says; we must affirm its principles to be timeless for every generation.

Now, one of the areas in which the Bible gives very clear teaching is the area of divorce and remarriage. We cannot alter that. We cannot change it to accommodate our quote/unquote "sophisticated day." We cannot back into the Bible with contemporary ideas and change the Scripture or eliminate the ones that we feel are an intrusion on our life patterns. We must objectively, openly hear what the Bible says. And our Lord gives us a very clear statement in regard to divorce.

The Pharisees came to Jesus in Matthew chapter 19 and they said in verse 3: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?" And Jesus, in effect, said: No, you cannot get a divorce for every cause, there's only one cause in the law of God for God's people and that is hardhearted adultery and

then the innocent partner is free to remarry.

Now that is a simple statement. I really don't think there's a lot of confusion about that if you understand the Scripture. Now you can back into the Bible with your preconceptions and come up with a lot of things, and people have done that and confused the church in many ways. But it's very clear if you just take it from the text. The problem with it is it's so isolated, it doesn't tell us about all the exceptions. It doesn't answer all of our myriad questions. It just lays down one principle.

Now, in order to broaden our understanding, we must go elsewhere in the New Testament and I want to take you now to I Corinthians chapter 7 because I believe this chapter is Paul's commentary on the divine principle, Paul's commentary on the divine law, Paul's commentary on the teaching of our Lord. Now keep in mind that Paul was dealing in a society much like ours, much like ours. I told you last time that there were basically four kinds of marriage within the Roman system. And people were married under all kinds of ... all of these kinds of means. For example, there was what we called contubernium which was tent companionship, slaves were just living together, it was sort of livein sex. In fact the slave owner would match two of them together to procreate other slaves. And there was no ceremony, there was no vow exchange, there was no covenant necessarily made, there was nothing official or legal about it, they just lived together. That's not unlike our time. We don't have slavery today but we sure have a lot of livein sex. We have people who come to Grace Church and are always curious when they do, some of them will apply for membership in the church and we'll notice that there's a man's name and a woman's name, completely different names, both living at the same address. Our conclusion is obvious, they live together, they're not married.

We have people who come to Christ in that kind of situation. They are not legally married. They've never been legally married. They're living together. It may have been they've only been together for a few weeks. They come to Christ and all of a sudden they face the fact that they're living in an ad...in a fornicating or adulterous relationship. What about them? What do they do? And that leads us to the idea of usus which was the Roman commonlaw, what if they've been living together for years? We've had that situation. I remember in a situation where a couple had come here, they were never legally married, had been together long enough to have three or four children and it was a longterm kind of thing and they came to Christ. Now what? What's their status? And what if they had former partners to whom they were legally married and now are not legally married? Is this just an extended case of fornication and adultery? Who's wife is she and whose husband is he?

And then you had the Roman coemptio in manum situation where there was a selling of the daughter by the father for economic gain. And we even have seen that. I remember a man who came here from a foreign country who had a wife which he had purchased from the father, he didn't really like her, in fact, it was a family relationship. The family had worked it out and in other cultures that happens. He was assigned to marry her. He took off. He's been living in America for six years. She's over in the orient somewhere; He comes to Christ and wants to know what about her?

And then you had that final confarreatio which was the sort of noble wedding with vows and all the legal stuff. But here in the case of the Apostle Paul, there were these people coming to Christ in the midst of all of these kind of chaotic approaches to marriage. Some of them just living together. Some of them in the midst of adultery...others in fornication relationships. Some had been married and divorced over and over again, now they come to Christ, they don't know what their status is, they don't know who they belong to, if anybody, or if they're free to marry anybody else.

And you add to that all of the vice and vile activity of that culture, to Corinthianize meant to have an affair with a prostitute. That's what Corinth did. That was the best definition of a Corinthians, one who had relationships with a prostitute. There was in Corinth the Temple of Aphrodite and it had at least a thousand priestesses and every evening the priestesses would descend from the temple ground of Aphrodite, down into the streets of Corinth to ply their trade. They were prostitutes at night. And when you paid your money to the prostitute, you were not only indulging in a quote/unquote "religious experience" but you were giving them the money which was used to support the temple. They actually built the Temple of Aphrodite from proceeds earned by the prostitute priestesses.

So, the life style of the Corinthians was at the very pits to say the least. The Romans, frankly, had had a more moralistic view of marriage. But as one historian notes for us, though militarily and politically, Rome conquered Greece; morally and socially, Greece conquered Rome. And in the marriage of the Greek and Roman cultures, the Roman might prevailed and the Greek immorality prevailed. And the seeds of destruction were built into the Roman Empire because of the corrupt life style of the influence of Greeks. It came to be a rather common jest among the Romans that marriage had two happy days: the day you first clasped your wife to your breast, and the day you put her in the tomb. And so, they mocked marriage.

Now, the Apostle Paul is confronting a society like this. He's not talking to a Jewish society like our Lord was, that had been reared and raised on Mosaic Law, a society where people were trying to conform to the divine standard all along, even though they were unable fully to do that. He is talking to an utterly pagan society, is Paul, who had no relationship to the law of God, whose background is literally jammed full of incongruities in terms of God's law, who are in and out of marriages and relationships ad infinitum adnauseam. And now they're coming to Christ and they're asking very basic questions. What is my status? Where do I stand? And so forth.

Now, they wrote to Paul a letter, chapter 7 verse 1 tells us about it: "Concerning the things about which you wrote unto me." They wrote him a letter and they want him to know about these issues. Tell us what the situation is. And they asked him a series of questions which he answers in chapter 7.

The first question we noted last Sunday. They asked him "Is sex unspiritual?" Naturally, if you'd come out of that kind of life style, if you'd lived in the midst of that kind of filth and lewdness and so

forth, that kind of pornographic approach to life, you might just say, "Now that I'm a Christian, I'm just going to forget all that sexual stuff." And even though you wanted to clean up your life and do it right, your mind would be so flooded with the garbage of the past that you couldn't really have a pure relationship in your mind. It would take a long time to divorce yourself from all that garbage that cluttered up your thinking. And so, some people were saying, "We just need to stop it altogether." And somebody must have unloaded on the Corinthians that all sex was unspiritual anyway, it was all evil, it was all sinful and now that you're a Christian you'd eliminate it altogether.

So, he answers that question in verse 1 by saying, "It's okay for a man notto touch a woman**."** And that's a euphemism for having a sexual relationship. It's okay not to have that. If you want to be celibate, that's all right, that's okay. But verse 2 says, "In order to avoid fornication, most people need to be married." Celibacy is okay but for most folks it's very tempting, because God made us for marriage. Nothing wrong with sex within marriage, it's Godinvented, Goddesigned, Godcreated, Godblessed. It's a marvelous and glorious thing. It's okay to be single, too, but it's also okay to get married and if you try to be single when you ought to get married, you're just going to get yourself in a situation where you'll be tempted severely. So, it's okay not to have a sex relationship. But it's not okay to fight it off and be tempted and do all kinds of sinful things in your mind and ultimately with your body because you can't control your temptation.

And then in verse 3 to 5, he goes a step further and says: "And there is absolutely no place for celibacy in marriage." There is a place for celibacy among single folks, if that's your choice and that's God's design, that's fine. Most people need to get married. But once you're married, there is no place for celibacy and that's why verse 5 says: "Stop depriving each other."

And then in verse 7 he says: "I wish that everybody could be single like I am, it's of great benefit for serving the Lord. But every man has his proper grace gift from God, one after this manner and another after that." Everybody's different, God made some people to be single, some people to be married. And it's a gift from Him. So is sex unspiritual? No, it's not. It's okay not to engage in that, if God's called you to a life of singleness and has given you the gift to deal with that. It's also okay to be married. And if you are married, it's not okay to be celibate. So, sex is not unspiritual. Sex is very spiritual. It's created by God, it is the...it is the most obvious affirmation of the oneflesh truth. And keep in mind if you are single it's not for freedom's sake, it's not for promiscuity's sake andit's not forlack of commitment's sake, it's for the service of the kingdom sake.

And the second question is posed which Paul answers. Listen to this question. "Should those formerly married remarry?" Should those formerly married, remarry? This is really a key question. Look what you've got in the Corinthian church. People are saved. They come to Christ and they're single but they use to be married. Now that they have become Christians, do they have a right to marry again? Or, if they make a mistake in the past prior to salvation, are they stuck with that thing for the rest of their life? That's the issue. And I believe what the Apostle Paul says in verse 8 and following refers to

those people who are now single but before conversion were formerly married. It's the only thing that makes sense outof this passage and I'll show you why as we look at it. It is a real issue for all of us to understand. Many people in our church have come to Christ, they're single but they were formerly married and want to know whether they have a right to marry. I believe this speaks to that.

Verse 8: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I." Now Paul's back on his bandwagon for singleness again, and you're going to hear it all the way through this chapter, he really thinks it's a great way to go... if you're so gifted He's trying to keep the people gifted in singleness to stay single so they can be maximumly used for God's purposes. But he says: "I say to the unmarried and widows." Now, note two categories: the unmarried and the widows, there's one other major category in this chapter and it is in verse 25: "Now concerning virgins..." This chapter deals with unmarried, widowed and virgins. Those are three, get it now, classes of single people. Those are three classes of single people ... the unmarried, the widowed, the virgins.

Now, let's understand what those classes are. Virgins are single people who have...what?... never been married, right? Widows are single people who formerly were married but were released from that marriage by...what?...by death. Now that leaves us with the unmarried. And that is a key term in this chapter. The virgins, arthenos, we know what they are... they've never married. The widows, chrais those now made single by death. But who are the unmarried? And I believe that is the key interpretive word if we're going to understand this chapter and I don't think that anything I've read really deals with that term and I hope I can make some contribution to that in this message.

Now, in order to understand the term, I want you to kind of work your way with me, go to verse 32 for a moment. The term "unmarried" is agamos. It is used only in this chapter in the whole New Testament. So, we have to take our understanding of it from this chapter. It's used four times and only here. We notice in verse 32: "He that is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord." It's used very generally there. We can't learn anything about the definition there. It's just a general statement that he that is unmarried as opposed to verse 33, he that is married. One is gamos, as it were, and the other is agamos, married/unmarried. Thereit's used in a very general sense and it's not used in any way that we can really isolate its definition. But as we move ahead to verse 34 we see something very interesting. Here Paul uses it in a more technical way. He says: "And a virgin, and the unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord that she may be holy both in body and in spirit." Now, he's using unmarried along with virgin.

Now, if you're talking about virgins and unmarried, they've got to be two different things, otherwise you don't need to say "...and the unmarried...." So, whoever the unmarried are, they aren't virgins. Because this is the virgin and the unmarried, right? So now we have two groups and now we're beginning to see the unmarried category sort of narrow down a little bit.

Now, let's go to verse 8 again where we were. And we read there: say to the unmarried and widows..." now listen carefully, from verse 34 we learn that the unmarried aren't virgins, right? And from verse 8 we learn that the unmarried aren't ... what?...widows either.

You say, "If the unmarried aren't ... if that isn't referring to the virgins and it isn't referring to the widows, what's it referring to?"

Verse 11, the fourth use in the chapter tells us. Verse 10 says that a wife should not divorce her husband. "But if she divorces, let her remain ... what?...unmarried." Now you have the specific meaning of the Word "unmarried." It refers to people who were ... what?... divorced, that's what it says. That is where it's used and that's how it's used.

So, when you come back then to verse 8, you've got two categories of single people: the unmarried and the widows.. Those both are formerly married people. The widows were formerly married until death. The unmarried were formerly married until divorce.

When you go to verse 34, you have the virgin and the unmarried and that speaks of single people, some who have never been married, some who have been formerly married. Now don't get lost. The only way to really understand the word here is to understand it as referring to formerly married people. It is not virgins because it's used with that word. Itis not widows because it's used with that word. When it is used alone, in verse 11, it is referring to someone who has divorced. So, I see this a very important point in understanding this passage. I'm not interested in what anybody believes or doesn't believe or what this book says or that book says, I just want to see what the Word of God says. And you've got to work through that word "unmarried." And the best way to understand that word in this context is that it refers to people who were formerly married, but are not widows... people who are now single but are not virgins. And that's got to be people formerly married. So we know Paul's talking to them...to the formerly married. Married...and I believe he's talking to people before Christ, prior to the coming of salvation in their life. They've come to Christ. And the question they're asking is, "Now do I have a right to marry?"

Let's say I had married twice back then and I got divorces and even I was guilty adulterer, or there was no adultery, the divorces had nothing to do with what...we didn't even think of God's law, it was just our former life style. Now I'm single, or now I'm widowed, do I have a right to remarry? And what does he say in verse 8? "It's good if you stay the way I am." And he's right back to that same deal again, stay single if you can.

"But if they (both groups) cannot have selfcontrol, let them... what? ... marry." Now this is God's provision for those people now single who were formerly married prior to their conversion. That's the only interpretation that makes any sense out of the passage. Because that's the question they're asking. You go over to verses 17 to 24 and all through that whole passage the implication is now that

I've become a Christian, what do I change? And Paul's answer to that is basically "Nothing." Stay in the state you are. Stay in the state you are. Stay single if you can. If you can't, get married because it is better to marry than to...what? ... than to burn with lust or passion.

Now, the Bible says that. It is better to get married than to spend your whole life fighting off the threat of fornication or adultery because you can't control your passion. God didnot create you with that desire and that drive in order to live an entire life of absolute frustration. If you can stay single, stay single. It's a gift of God. If you can't, even though you formerly were married and something was goofed up in the past, now that you've come to Christ, you are given, I believe in this passage, not only the right but the instruction to get married...because it's better to marry than to go through life burning.

And so, when a person becomes a Christian, I think there's a new day, a dawning of a new day. I think there's something brand new that happens and the grace of Jesus Christ that saves the soul and sentence the body to a lifetime of utter frustration and anxiety. There's no point in that. "Because if any man be in Christ he's...what?... he's a new creation." Everything starts all over again. And God permits the widows to remarry obviously. And here, I believe, He permits the formerly married to marry as well. So, whether single by death or single by divorce, there is that right and that privilege. It's better to marry than to burn.

That's why he says in 1 Timothy 5, does Paul, and he talks about the young widows when their husbands die when they're young, he says Don't let them assign themselves to a life of service to Christ. Of course, if they're gifted for it fine, but don't let them hurry to do that because the time's going to come when they're going to grow wanton against Christ. In other words, they're going to be sorry they did that vow; they made that promise, because they're going to want a husband... and then they're going to have lust problems. So, it's better for the widows, the young ones, he says, to marry. So that's affirming the same thing. It is better to marry than to burn.

So, we don't want to restrain someone who comes to Jesus Christ by saying "Well, you were responsible to live the law of God all your lifelong, even before you were ever saved or even knew the law of God or even cared about the law of God. And if you ever blew it anytime in the whole life thatyou've lived prior to Christ, you're stuck." I don't see that as the intention of this passage or the heart of God.

Now, that ought to be liberating for some folks... and God is a God of grace and a God of liberation. But let me just give you a little bit of advice. You think through very carefully if, in fact, you should not stay single...because that seems to be Paul's priority kind of thing, the potential for that. And then if you do marry, would you pick up the note at the end over verse 39 and remember that when you remarry, you are to marry whoever you want, you can marry whoever you want, but only in the Lord? Only in the Lord. What does that mean? Only a Christian and only in the will of God. You could marry

a Christian but the wrong Christian. So you want to marry a Christian and you want to marry the right one in the Lord, in the leading of the Lord, in the guiding of the Lord, in the will of the Lord. That's the issue.

So, the question is should those who were formerly married, marry again? And the answer is Yes, if they don't have the gift of singleness, they ought to marry. In fact, they ought to marry for sure rather than spend their whole life burning and trying to fight off that unfulfilled need. But when you marry, marry only in the will of God.

Now, that's one step... that's the right to marry and some of you are saying Oh boy, I can marry. But that's only half the deal. I mean, now that I'm available, I ... I'm...I can't find anybody who's interested.

And that's a problem because now you've got a gap. You say I'm available ... I'm free to marry...now, anybody interested?

You know, I remember the story about the guy who was going to have a ser ... a wedding at the end of a church service, they use to do that in the old days, and the service ended and they prepared to have the couple come and he said: "The service is complete, now we'd like those who desire to be married to please come forward." And it's a known fact that one bachelor and 84 old maids came. But that wasn't the atten...that wasn't the intention. That wasn't the intention.

But it is God's intention, it is God's intention that we remarry if, in fact, we're made for marriage. That's the grace of God. Now... but this is key for you to understand. If there's a gap between your right and its fulfillment, the question always comes up How you going to handle that? How you going to handle the anxiety? How do you handle the pressure when you know you need to marry, you want to marry, you're made to marry and you can't get it fulfilled? How do you deal with the burning Problem?

Let me give you some suggestions, okay?that I think are just very practical. Channel your energy through physical work and spiritual ministry. Channel your energy through physical work and spiritual ministry. Idle moments don't help...at all.

Secondly, stay close to and accountable to a Christian friend. Don't live alone, don't travel alone, go places alone, do things alone where you put yourself in vulnerable spots. Stick close to somebody where you have real accountability with someone who's mature and understands your needs.

Thirdly, pray for purity and stay in the Word. Pray daily for purity and stay in the Word.

Fourth, don't seek only to get married. Don't take any plane that's leaving the airport. Figure out where you want to go before you get on. You seek to honor Christ in your life and honor Christ in a

relationship of friendship and let God bring about a marriage.

Avoid sexmad, adulterous, worldly temptations. Be careful what you let into your senses ... what you see and what you hear and where you go, because whatever you pump in is going to have an impact on you.

Count on divine enabling, is another one, to live for now without fulfillment. Count on God to give you the strength.

Another one, avoid all potentially dangerous situations. Stay away from them. Because even though you may feel you're innocent, you may not be able to control somebody else.

And finally, praise God in the midst of it and be content. Praise has a very wholesome effect.

Channel your energy through physical work, spiritual ministry. Stay close to and accountable to a Christian friend. Pray for purity and stay in the Word. Don't seek only to be married, seek to honor Christ in a relationship and let God bring about a marriage. Avoid the sexmad, adulterous world. Count on divine enabling. Avoid all potentially dangerous situations. And praise God and be content.

And if you're that kind of a person, they'll be beating a path to your door to marry you. Cause those are the kind of people other folks are looking for. When the right one comes along, let me give you a little advice. Have a spiritual relationship and a short engagement.

So, question number twostill with me folks? So, question number two, should formerly married people remarry? The answer is It's optional. If you can stay single, stay single. If you can't, then marry, it's okay. It's better to marry than to burn.

There's a third question in the passage... they're implied, by the way, we don't have the questions here but you can tell what they are by the answers. The third one is What are the alternatives for those that are married? And you know, this is what was happening in Corinth, right? People become Christians and they say Boy, I'm married to an unsaved partner, I'm going to get rid of my partner. I'm going to dump my unsaved wife. I'm going to get rid of my unsaved husband. I'm going to unload this spouse that doesn't understandthe Lord.

And I'm sure some guy got up and somebody was...was teaching, you've got to get rid of your unsaved partner because it's the devil in your house. It's the demons in your house. It will corrupt your kids. You can't walk together unless you be agreed. You can't have light with darkness. You've got to get rid of that unsaved partner. Beelzebub. See.

And you can just hear somebody waxing eloquent on that kind of thing and it really sounds good. And so the ... the sort of the temptation would be to just get rid of your unsaved partner. Or, now that

you're a Christian, you say, I'm going to be a spiritual Christian and I'm not real happy with this union, we made this marriage before we were saved, now that we're Christians, we both have different approaches to life and we're not getting along so we'll just start all over again. And we'll dump each other and get another marriage going.

So, the question then he has to answer is, "What happens now that you've become Christians, you're still married, do you stay married or do you shed your partner, what are your rights and privileges in that regard?" And he takes off on that in chanter 7 verse 10, so he says: "Unto the married," now he's moved out of the widows and unmarried, the formerly married, divorced and by death made single, and now he talks to those that are married. They came to Christ and they were married. And he says: "I command now, I command, and it isn't even me," he says, "this is the Lord's command, Let not a wife divorce her husband." He goes right back to Matthew 5 and 19 and right back to God's standard from the very beginning in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 and all the rest of the parts of the Bible that talk about it and says if you're married, stay married. And I believe he's referring here to two Christians because in verse 12 he says: "To the rest, I speak...." and here he speaks of a Christian married to a nonChristian. So, he doesn't get to that until 12, this has got to be to two Christians. So, these two come to the Lord and he says, "Stay married, don't depart from your husband." That's literally don't divorce your husband.

But you know what? He knows some people will. So, he says If you're going to disobey God at point one, stop there, would ya? Verse 11: "But even if she does divorce..." see, he knows. You can tell people what God wants and they'll go and do what they want anyway. So, he sets up another roadblock, he says If you break law one, please stop there. Don't go any further. He's not saying you ought to get a divorce at all, but he's saying if you're going to be disobedient there, don't go any further than that, because if you do divorce, you've got two options: the rest of your life you remain formerly married, or you be reconciled to your husband. Then he turns it and says, "Let the husband not divorce his wife." So don't get a divorce. If you're both married and you're both Christiansno divorce. And if you violate that law of God, commanded by the Lord, it Is a command, verse 10, by the way, not a suggestion. It's not ... it's not a counselor's nice idea, it's not good advise, it's a command Stay married. And if you do divorce, and of course he's not considering the adultery exception here, that's been considered in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 and that's there, we don't change that, it just isn't brought up here. If there was a adulterous thing going on, then there would be freedom to divorce and remarry. But apart from that, not considering that exception, just reaffirming the divine ideal here as is done in some of the other gospels, he just says don't get a divorce and if you do, you have to remain formerly married for life or else go back to your husband. So, that's all you can do.

Now, if you marry again, if you divorce a Christian partner and you... you don't get back together and you don't remain formerly married all your life but you go marry somebody else, you've just become ... what? ... an adulterer and you've just turned the person you married into an adulteress. So, that's

exactly what the Jews were doing. Had no grounds for divorce, shedding their wives, remarrying and committing adultery all over the place.

And so, if you're married to a Christianstay marriedstay married. And if you're going to violate that, for God's sake stop there and don't go any further and get reconciled or else stay single the rest of your life. And if two people have only those two options, it seems to me they're going to be in a hurry to complete option reconcile ... not option formerly married forever.

Let's go to verse 12. Now here are some people who are married and they're a mixed marriage ... Christian/non-Christian. And they're, of course, asking the question, the Christian is, do I get out of this union? And maybe this guy...maybe this guy worships some idols, right? Good chance. This woman, let's say, is Christian She's married to a guy who worships idols ... is married to a guy who cheats in his business ... married to a guy whose language is filthy... this guy is ... is just a pagan guy. And all of a sudden she's become white as snow, as pure as wool and Christ has transformed and changed her life and now she sees all the ugliness of the past and she sees his sinfulness and she wants to be with God's people. And as Tertullian said, She wants to kiss a martyr's bonds and she wants to embrace a Christian brother and sister, she wants to go along the streets to the cottages of the poor, meeting their needs and her husband doesn't know what's going on and all this religion's throwing him for a loop. And he can't handle the whole deal, or viceversa, if it happened to a husband.

What do you do? Do you just unload the guy and marry a nice Christian and get on with raising Christian kids? Wouldn't that seem reasonable? Boy, get rid of the pagan, let pagans marry the pagans, and we'll marry a Christian, raise up a bunch of kids. Plus, what's going to happen with all our kids? I'm a Christian, he's not, and all my kids are going to be raised and exposed to paganism. My kids will be all corrupted by this guy. I mean, he drinks and he does this and he does that and he does the other, or she does this, she does that, she does the other...and it's going to corrupt our whole family. We've got to get out of this deal. And, boy, that sounds like good counsel.

And what does Paul say? Verse 12: "To the rest, speak I, and I don't have any straight commandment from the Lord, the Lord didn't discuss this, this isn't quoting Jesus, it's equal to His truth because it's inspired by the Spirit, but he says I'm not quoting the Lord but I'm telling you this, if a brother has a wife that doesn't believe and she's please to dwell with him, let him not divorce her." If she wants to live with you, if she wants to stay with you, don't divorce her. Don't divorce her.

"And the woman who has a husband that believes not, if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him." Don't you dare divorce an unbeliever if they don't want out. Don't you do that.

You say, "Well, wait a minute. It's going to corrupt me. How can light and darkness go along together? How can Christ and Belial get along? How can you have that kind of relationship? The

intimacy of a oneflesh relationship between a believer and an unbeliever? Boy, I'd just love to marry a Christian. Oh man, I'd love to marry a Christian."

No, it says you stay together. You say Well, I'm liable to get corrupted and all my kids will get corrupted. No, just the opposite's true. Verse 14, instead of you getting corrupted, the unbeliever's going to get sanctified. "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife; the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were the children unclean, now they are sanctified."

Now what kind of sanctification is this? Salvation? Do you get saved by having a Christian spouse? Do you get saved by having Christian mother or Christian father?

Of course not. This means they're set apart unto blessing. In other words, instead of an unbeliever messing up a home, a believer in the midst of the unbeliever brings blessing into that home. In other words, you as a Christian married to a non-Christian bring blessing into that home for that person. Why? Because God is pouring out His grace and His benediction and His mercy and His loving kindness and His goodness and blessing on you as a believer and it's going to splash on the person who's one flesh with you. Instead of that person corrupting you, you're going to bring a positive Godward kind of influence on that person and on your children as well .... on your children as well.

So, you don't get a divorce. Even if you're married to an unbeliever, stay together. But, but, verse 15: "If the unbelieving divorces ... 11 literally it means chrizme, takes himself out, "a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases. God has called us to peace." He hasn't called you to a life of fighting, and warring and trying to keep somebody there who won't stay. God is not interested in warfare, He's interested in peace. He wants His beloved children to experience peace even in their domestic relationships and if you've got an unbeliever who wants to take himself out, let him take himself out. You're not in bondage. It is the same idea as in Romans 7:2 where it says a woman is in bondage to her husband only as long as he lives, when he's deadshe's free. Here, same thing. Same kind of bondage, when the unbeliever departs, takes himself out of the union, you do not need to fight to keep that thing together because you are no longer under that bondage. God has not called you to live a life of fighting a war with an unbelieving person who can't stand anything about you or what you believe and wants out.

Now, salvation causes this kind of a problem to happen in a family. And the Lord says stay together unless the unbeliever wants out, and if that person wants to take himself out, let him take himself out. Now this is a very freeing truth. Let me tell you something practical about this. This means that you don't have to sacrifice your Christian principles to keep an unbeliever in a marriage. Did you hear that? Very often, you know, people say Well, I ... I...I've got to keep this marriage together and if I keep doing these spiritual things, it just irritates him more and more so if I will just acquiesce to his kind of life, we can stay together. Don't you do that. Don't you ever compromise Godordained divine principles, you live those things to the very hilt in your life and if that person has to get out of that

marriage because of the purity and thesanctity and the godliness and the virtue of your life in that marriage, then the Bible says you're free. But as soon as you start to compromise your spirituality, you're...you're stepping into a nevernever land ... because you're going to try to keep a marriage together by violating God's principles? A fighting, quarrelsome home is not God's will and neither is a compromising Christian. You live your life for the glory of God and do all you can, lovingly, generously, graciously to do everything to win that partner. As I Peter 3 says, if you're a wife, you do everything you can to win that one who does not obey the Word by the purity of your life and your chaste conduct. You be as godly a virtuous wife as you can be as loving as you can be but don't you ever compromise your spiritual principles.

And if you're a husband and you're in the same situation, you be as loving and tender and good and gracious as you can be but don't you ever abandon the Godgiven truth and principle and place of responsibility that you have in that relationship. And if that unbelieving partner will not respond to the blessing of God and be led to salvation, but reacts in violence to break up the union, then you're free.

And then someone is going to say But if I do that, then they're not saved and whose going to reach them? And you know, so forth? So he says in verse 16: "For what do you know, O wife, whether you'll save your husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

Don't try to keep a marriage together for evangelism. Evangelism isn't a good reason to be married. You don't get married for evangelism. You don't go -Oh, there's a beautiful girl, I think I'd like to evangelize her. She's not a Christian, I'll win her to the Lord. Don't you do that. Marriage is not for evangelism. And the purpose of evangelism isn't any good reason to keep one together either because how do you know you're going to do that? How do you know you're going to have that effect? And why would you spend your whole life fighting and warring in a situation where someone wants out just for the sake of an evangelism you don't even know whether you can accomplish? And in the back of your mind, remember this that the Lord knows what He's doing and if He's going to minister in that person's heart**,** and He's going to bring about the work of grace in their life, it isn't as if you were the only person in the world He could use.

So, cling to a marriage if you're two believers. Don't divorce.

If you're a believer and an unbeliever, cling to that marriage and be everything you should be as a Christian and in living your Christian life to the very fullest; if that unbeliever wants out, you're free. You're free and I believe your freedom is a freedom to remarry. If it wasn't, he would have repeated what he repeated in verse 11 when he said there: "If you divorce, then you must remain unmarried or be reconciled." And if you could only be free from that marriage but never marry again, why wouldn't he have repeated that same phrase? No, no... if you're freeyou're free...just the same freedom in Romans 7 that death gives. So if an unbeliever has left you, if they wanted out of that union, you're free.

Now the sum of all that he's been saying is in verses 17 to 24 and I guess we could say that there's a question behind this and the question is sort of generally then, Should salvation change your marital status? And what's the answer? No. No, it shouldn't. Verse 17: "Only as the Lord has distributed to every man as God has called every one, so let him walk. So, I ordain in all the churches."

What's your message to the church, Paul? I mean, how ... what's, your practical message? Look, the message is this. The way God made you, the way ordained you, the way called you, that's the way you ought to walk. In other words, if...if He designed you for marriage, you ought to get married. If He designed you for singleness, you ought to be single. And if you were saved married, stay married. And if you were saved single, stay single unless you feel you need to get married. He's just saying Look, what I say in all the churches is that the Lord has to work this out as He distributes to every individual. And only you know between you and God whether you need to be single or married. But...but salvation shouldn't change those things.

Verse 18: "If you...if you were called, if you were saved being circumcised, don't become uncircumcised." I can't imagine how you could, but that's what he says. "Is any called in uncircumcision, let him not be...let him not be circumcised, because circumcision isn't anything anyway." In other words, he says if you were called being circumcised, you don't do something about that, do you? So, why you going to change your marriage? If you were called in verse 20, he says, in some situation, stay in the same calling in which you were called. When you were called to the Savior, when you were... come to Christ in whatever state, stay there. If you were called being a servant, stay a servant. If you're called being a free man, stay a free man.

And verse 24 sums it up. "Let every man in whatever state he's called, abide with God." So, salvation shouldn't tear marriages apart, shouldn't disrupt life in that sense.

Is sex unspiritual? No.

Should those saved after widowed or divorced remarry? Yes. If they can't stay single for the service of the Lord.

What are the alternatives for those who are married? If you're married to a Christian, stay married. If you're married to a non-Christian, stay married unless the non-Christian wants out, then you're free to remarry.

Should salvation change your marital status? No.

Question number five: Should those never married, marry? You know, the question was coming up Boy, you know, if sex is so bad in our society and all this gross stuff, and now that we want to live

pure unto God, the virgins were saying we ought to stay celibate all our life. Well, the Catholic Church bought that whole deal, didn't they? Sure they did. They believe there's more virtue in being single and celibate than in being married. And so, you know, when you choose to be a priest or a...a sister or nun or whatever, you choose a life of celibacy and there were some people who were saying You know, ahwe're virgins, we've never entered into any kind of a relationship, is it better to stay that way? Should we marry?

Verse 25, he picks that up. Now let's get to the virgins, he says, parthenoi. "I have no commandment of the Lord." The Lord never commented on this...so I can't quote Jesus, "But I'm going to give you my judgment and it is the judgment by the way of a man who was faithful to God. So this is the divine judgment. I'm being true to the faith. I'm being consistent with God. I'm giving you good advice from the Holy Spirit as a man who's received mercy from the Lord to be faithful." So, this is God's advice to you. "If you're a virgin," he says in verse 26, "it's good." See, he's right back to that advocating of singleness again. It's good.

You see**,** society wants to pressure everybody to be married but there are...there's a reverse trend in this chapter where Paul's trying to pressure people to stay single if they can handle it because of the tremendous liberty in serving the Lord. So he says I think it's good. Stay single.

Why? Several reasons, are you ready?

Reason number one, he's very clear: the pressure of the system. Verse 26: "It's good for the present distress for a man to be a virgin," to be unmarried, to be celibate. The present distress? What are you talking about? Violence from a hostile world. You know, Christians were slaughtered everywhere and people lost their partners. And there's a lot of pain and anxiety in a persecuted situation, isn't there? People who came out of even the Holocaust in Germany, the Jewish people, who had their families killed, slaughtered, the tremendous amount of pain. He says because of the violence against us in these times, you'd be better off to be single.

Secondly, because of the problems of the flesh. Verse 28: "If you marry you have not sinned. If a virgin marries she's not sin, nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh." Why? Because we're human beings and it's tough enough for one sinner to live with one sinner, but for one sinner to live with himself and another sinner is tough. I mean, the flesh gets in the way of our relationships. So know this, if you're going to get married you're going to undergo some pressure from the system and you're also going to undergo some problems from the flesh. The word there for trouble is thlipsis, it means "the crushing together" and when you crush two lives together you're going to have some problems.

Then the passing of the world is his third reason to stay single. "...time is short..." verse 29. And he says at the end of verse 31: "...the fashion of the world passes away." Everything in the world is going

to go anyway and marriage is part of it. There's no marriage in heaven. So realize it's a temporal thing, it's a passing thing; it's just for here and now. So the pressure of the system and the problems of the flesh and the passing of the worldand then the preoccupation of the married, verses 32 to 34.

Married people care for the things of their families and their spouse and their children and all that. Unmarried people care for the Lord and so forth. So realize this, you're going to be preoccupied in marriage in ways you wouldn't be if you were single.

And then we might throw in the permanence of the union. And just picking up what the disciples thought back there in Matthew 19, they said if it's so binding it's better not to get married. In other words, once you get in it, you're in it for life ... so you better think about it.

So, the Apostle is giving us a good word here. He's saying it's good to be single, it's good to be single ... because of the passing world, the hard times coming, the difficulty of sinners living that close intimacy and proximity, because of the difficulty in being free to serve the Lord fully and so forth and so on. So, if you're a virgin, it's good...stay single. But, verse 28: "If a virgin marry, she hasn't sinned." She hasn't sinn ... it's no sin to marry. It's good to marry, too.

Now back up and let's pick up a summary in verse 27. Look at this. "Are you bound unto a wife?" What? "Seek not a divorce. Are you divorced from a wife?" What? "Don't seek to get married. But if you marry, you have not...what?...sinned. And if a virgin marries...." now note that. Two people here are given the right to marry: a virgin and a person loosed from a wife. Divorced, of course, on divine terms. If you've been loosed from a wife, now you've come to Christ, see if God would have you single but if you marry you haven't sinned.

Two more questions, I'm just going to give them to you fast. You know what else happened in the Corinthian church? In this whole deal about sex is evil and we ought to be celibate to the glory of God and all this, some fathers were imposing perpetual virginity on their children, their daughters. And so he has to deal with that in verse 36. He says: "If any man, any father thinks that he behaves himself in an unfitting manner toward his virgin," that's his virgin daughter, "if she pass the flower of her age," that means the time of her physical maturity or sexual maturity, "and need so require," that is she needs to be married, "let him do what he will, he sins not, let them marry."

See, here was a father saying boy, this singlenessPaul's really hot on this stuff, being celibate for the glory of God and devote your whole life to Jesus Christ and he's laying this big trip on this girl and she reaches the flowering of her age and she says, "Daddy, that's a wonderful thought, but I need to be married." And he's saying, "No, I want you to be spiritual." And she's saying, "But, Daddy, I can't be spiritual if I have to be single the rest of my life," it's too difficult a temptation and her need requires her to marry. So he says Hey, Dad, let the girl marry ... it's okay.

So, verse 38: "So he that gives her in marriage does well and he that gives her not in marriage does well." Hey, some of them ought to stay single...some of them ought to stay single.

And then the last question: What about the widows? What about them? Verse 39: "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives; if her husband's dead she's at liberty to be married to whom she will." And what's the last line again? "...only in the Lord." Only in the Lord...only in the Lord.

But then he throws this in: "But she's happier if she stays the way I am." See, he's always got to get that in there, see. And he said the things I've been saying at the end of verse 40

I have received from the Holy Spirit.

Good words to us, very clear. Let me summarize quickly, listen now.

You're single...if you're single you fall into four categories. Category number one is what I call the "delay." You're single but you're not goingto stay that way. This is just a delay until you can get married. What does the Word say to you? Get married, right? Better to marry than to burn.

You're single by "divine design" for the service of Christ. What should you do? Stay single.

You're single by "divorce." Well, you should consider whether you ought to stay single first of all and then if you've been divorced out of an adulterous situation or if your divorce was before you were saved, or if your divorce was an unbeliever departingyou're free to marry. In fact, it's better for you to marry than to burn also.

And the fourth category of singleness is those that are single by "death." Stay single if you can. But if you can't, get marriedyou haven't sinned.

Now what about the married? If you're married to a Christian... what? ... stay married. If you're married to a non-Christian ... what?... stay married. If the unsaved person wants outlet him out, you're free.

Now, there's only one other category. And some of you are sitting there saying Ummmm, I've got a problem ... because I got a divorce that wasn't legitimate when I was a Christian, I fouled up my marriage when I was a Christian ... I am an adulterer or an adulteress ... I remarried when I had no groundswhat is my status? Well, you're a sinner. Welcome to the club. If you've already violated God's laws as a Christian, if you were illegitimately divorced, illegitimately remarried when you had no grounds, if you're in a union that the Bible defines as an adulterous union, you have only one recourse... that is, to confess the sin, tell God the sorrow of your heart, and stay in that same union and see if God will not make sweet out of the bitter...honey out of the lion's body.

You see, if we confess our sins He's faithful and just to... what?...forgive us our sins. And it's easy for us who haven't had sin in that area to sit in judgment on those because we forget the sins of our own life. And God's in the sinforgiving business ... Matthew 12:31 says: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven you."

One pastor suggested that if that's your case you've got to divorce the adulterous partner and try to get back with the other one... don't do that. That you cannot unscramble the egg... stay where you are, confess it, repent and thank God for the grace that you're still alive and make the most out of the union you have.

Well, I don't think the Bible's that fuzzy, is it, on divorce... pretty clear. It's only a question of whether we'll be obedient. Let's pray.

Father, we come again with thankful hearts for the clarity with which the Spirit of God speaks through the Word. Help us to be as Paul said to Timothy, "Diligent to be approved of God, workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Help us to study the Word. You know my heart, Lord; you know that I haveprayed that I would speak Your truth and Your truth only from the pages of Your book. And may You be pleased with our response as well. And You make of every single life for Your glory, all the fullness that You would have planned in eternity for that life. And for those single who need to be married, would You bring them the right partner because they're the right person? Would You set their life in the line of the Spiritcontrolled life, a life of obedience so that they'll be led to the right person? For those that are married, would You make the most of those marriages? For those, O God, that are married to an unsaved partner, would You bring that partner to Christ? And for those who have been made single by death or divorce and are free to marry, would You bring them to the one they can marry in the Lord that the church may know the fullness of power that comes through obedience to Your holy Word?

Thank You for instructing us and help us to be not just obedient but eagerly so. And may we never tread on Your grace. If we have no right to marry, if we have no right to the relationship we're in, may we cease if that is possible. If not, may we repentantly seek Your forgiveness and be grateful for grace?

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