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## 1 Corinthians 7:8-40 - God's Word On Love & Marriage

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If you open your Bibles tonight to 1 Corinthians 7:8, we'd like to continue our study.

Paul wrote this letter to a church that was by now about eight years old or so. It was a church that was really planted by a miracle of God. Paul had been in Europe for not very long, and everywhere he had gone, God had blessed; but, at the same time, there was a tremendous amount of persecution. By the time Paul got here, he'd been moved along by his friends for his own safety, and he had ended up here in Athens and then in Corinth. Very discouraged. And so the Lord came to Paul, and eventually his boys caught up with him, and he felt more encouraged. But the Lord came to him to assure him that everything was going to be fine; no one was going to beat him up or throw him in jail or oppose the work. And it was something that had happened every time. And so Paul was encouraged. He stayed here for a year and a half.

But Corinth was a very corrupt, sensual kind of port town. It was dominated by idols, temple prostitutes. The church, born into that kind of environment, had a lot to deal with. And, as a result, both this letter and the 2 Corinthian letter and the letter that we don't have (that Paul mentions) had a lot to do with correcting church life lived in a worldly place. And so it brings up a lot of things that we would maybe not deal with otherwise. But, at the same time, the Corinthian letter is corrective, but it tends to address things that are very helpful to us; especially when you get to chapter 8 through chapter 10 or 11 talking about our liberties: what can we do as Christians, what should we not do and why. They are very encouraging.

But Paul wrote this letter as a result, from what we read, of some folks coming to Ephesus where Paul would spend the next three years. And he met some of the elders, if you will, from the Corinthian church that were not happy with how things were being run. He'd met some home hosts, if you will, of these churches that had stopped by to see him as well, who were concerned about how the church was going. He got letters from there as well. Paul mentions them in chapter 5. With questions. We don't have that letter; we don't have Paul's first letter he wrote back. But you put those things together, and you surmise very quickly that he loved the people, he wanted to help them, there was a lot to be dealt with. But it was a really tough place to have church, and the world seems to have gotten in in many ways.

Paul called them carnal Christians, which is an interesting term. They should have grown up by now. They should have been teaching others about the Bible. They were just like little kids, and rather than having influence, they were dividing and division and side-taking. They'd lost sight of the fact Jesus had saved them all. They were all in there with the same reason and with the same joy. Paul talked to them about how....he wasn't a high-minded....he was a smart guy, but he didn't teach that way. He taught

with language people could understand. He didn't take great pride in the words that he chose. He was very dependent upon the Holy Spirit. The guy that took his place, Apollos, was very well learned and apparently spoke (kind of) smarter, if you will. So people began to say, "Well, we like him better than the other guy," and the division was just terrible, and the world was watching. And so Paul said, "Look, it doesn't really matter what road you take or what words you use. If it's the gospel, God will bless it, and we need to emulate serving the Lord, reaching the lost."

In chapter 5, Paul talked about the sin tolerance of the church. That seems to be something that maybe the church would be wise to listen to today. This happened to be an incestuous relationship of a son with his father's wife. The church didn't censure it, make a comment about it; they just embraced it as if all was well. And Paul said, "We can't do this. We've got to take sin seriously. Love demands that we care for each other."

He covered the same thing with lawsuits in chapter 6 – people suing one another for their own personal gain, I guess, rather than being a witness. He even said to them audacious words like, "Hey, wouldn't you rather just lose the case and win a soul?" and the other way around.

And so by the time we get to chapter 7, Paul has covered a lot of issues, and he really turns in this one chapter to marriages and the relationship of a husband to a wife. It could be – we aren't told – that chapter 7 kind of addresses the overcorrection of chapter 6. With all these illicit relationships with these temple prostitutes that are wrong, maybe we should just stop altogether. Maybe even being married is not the way to go. Maybe celibacy is better. Being single is the best of all. Is that more spiritual and all?

And we looked at, last week, in the first seven verses that Paul talked about his understanding of marriage and that it is all right to be married. But his leaning was, gosh, if you're single, you're very available to the things of God. If you're married, you've got a lot of things to consider before you can really get out there to serve the way that he wishes that you could. But he gives us....he took the line of what Jesus had taught about the sexual relationships in marriage, about the gifts of God, the purposes for marriage. We looked a little bit at Genesis last time as well.

Tonight, beginning in verse 8, we hope to finish the rest of the chapter. And you get some important principles. Now here's what I want to say to you about this chapter: most all of the Bible studies that we do are tremendously inspiring in the sense that they are spiritually applied quickly and can be applied to our lives. I would say to you that this chapter, especially these verses, are great for a reference book that you put on your library shelf. In other words, they are most useful when someone walks in, and they say, "Well, here's my situation. What does the Lord have to say to my marriage or my situation? Or what should I do and what can I not do?" And we use them a lot in that regard. I doubt you're going to leave here tonight with goosebumps. "Oh, the Lord really spoke to me!" I think it's almost a pastor's chapter, but at the same time, you and I should be well aware of what the Lord wants. These are kind of only the facts; they're

essential. We use them, like I said, in counseling a lot. There're a lot of people that, in their quest to have love in their lives and marriage or divorce or another person, they try to begin to twist the Scriptures in such a way that they can make it almost suit themselves no matter what. And in so doing, they disobey the very things that God wants to teach them. And I think, at least from the letter that Paul got from this church, there's a lot going on here. And there's certainly a lot going on in people's lives as well.

So, will you stick with me and work out and get the mindset, and next week I'll give you all the goosebumps you want because I think that's where we begin to learn about being sensitive in our freedoms which we really do need to take that to heart. But tonight I want to give you the facts and, with Paul, cover some circumstances and I suspect give you some definitions that you are probably not aware of but that you should be; and that when you go to apply these things to friends and maybe use God's Word as a counsel to those that you care about, you'll be able to have learned these and apply them to that situation.

So Paul ended last week by saying, "I wish you could all be single, but not everybody has that gift." So then we start in verse 8, "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*" (with passion added by the translator but certainly it's the right application). If the first question that Paul got in this letter that he's responding to was: is it more spiritual to be single and remain abstinent, I think the next question becomes what about those who've been divorced or who have been left widowed, who are saved? What is God's Word to them? Now I want to point out a couple things to you when you look at the text, and Paul uses some words that you need to know the definitions of, and I think it's important that you do.

In verse 10, Paul will speak (in a minute) to those that are married, and that word "married" means exactly what you think it does. Somebody who has committed themselves to another for life. It is the word "married." In verse 8 and verse 9, notice that he limits his words to the unmarried and to the widows. And in a few minutes, he's going to speak to virgins, which he will classify as unmarried but will give them a separate category. So there's married, there's unmarried, there's widows, and there are virgins. The word "virgin," "parthenos," means just what you think it does; someone who has never been married. The word "widow" is the Greek word "*chera*," and "*chera*" really means someone who was married but has now had a spouse that has died and they've been left alone. And the word "unmarried," "*agamos*," is only used four times in the Bible, and they're all in this chapter. But they are there to distinguish somebody from being married and to distinguish them as also a virgin; they're under the category of unmarried, but they are a separate category. So, just get those definitions in your head. Because since we know that the unmarried are separated from marriage and separated the widow as well, and not a virgin – although in a technical and generic sense she is or he is – the chapter speaks to the unknown person, and it's always the definition of someone who was married but now they're divorced. It only applies to that category, if you will.

So, in verses 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16, Paul writes to those who are saved or were saved after they were married and now find themselves married to an unbelieving spouse; and we'll get to that in a minute.

But in verses 8 and 9, notice that Paul writes to those who are single when they came to know the Lord; single due to being divorced, single due to the fact that they'd been widowed. You don't find virgins in this portion because they haven't been married, so they don't need any counsel. But the question was: what do the unmarried, the widow, what does he do now that he finds himself coming to the Lord?

Verse 9, if they cannot control themselves, it's better to marry than to burn with passion. Remember back last week that Paul said, "I wish you were all single like me because you can have a lot of time to serve the Lord," but then he wasn't naïve to the fact that that certainly isn't everybody's calling. In fact, we mentioned to you last week: if Paul belonged to the Sanhedrin, which he certainly did, one of the requirements to belong to that ruling body was that you had to be married. So at some point along the way – and we don't know where along the way – whether Paul was saved before or after, I don't know, he realized that his life of being single now was the way he could serve the Lord with the greatest opportunity. And so he's constantly, I won't say pushing it, but I'll say highlighting that. "It's better, man. The time is running short. The Lord is coming. The world needs to get saved. Whatever is in your way, let's get rid of it so that we can serve the Lord. Praise the Lord."

In verses 1-7, is it more holy being single? Paul is single. And he said, "No! It's whatever gift God has given you." In verses 8 and 9 here, he says, "Well, if you're single when you get saved, stay that way if you can. It's still the best place to be. However, if you can't stay that way, get married. There's nothing wrong with that either." So whatever was being taught in Corinth as far as spiritual and God's will, Paul kind of cuts through all of the baloney and said, "Look, my opinion is it's best to be single – for the work ahead, for the times in which we live, for the time that it takes. However, if God hasn't called you to that," (verse 7, for example, verse 9 again, and he'll say it several more times) "do whatever God has called you to do. But the right thing is then to get married." So if you have great desire for a physical relationship, the calling is from the Lord; the execution of it is bad timing. Right? Now you have to wait to be in a relationship in marriage to pursue those things that are important to you.

Before we start in verse 10 down through verse 16, can you jump to verse 17 for a minute? And I'm only doing that – not to confuse you – but it continues the same thought from verses 8 and 9 and that is live as you are called, and the big picture lesson is whatever position you find yourself in when the Lord saves you, that's where you need to stay. Verse 17, "But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let

each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.” And that’s, I think, the crux of these verses. Verse 21, “Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ’s slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.” And it’s in the context of this marriage chapter. Whatever state you find yourself in, remain there. Come to the Lord single, good for you. That’s the most spiritual place to be. You come to the Lord divorced, you have no obligation to do anything else. You’ve come out of a life of sin and darkness into the grace of God. If you come in as a widow, if you’ve come in married (and he’ll talk about that in a minute), even if your spouse does not believe and now you do. Nothing needs to be changed. You’re saved. That’s awesome. It has really no implication to your marital stature.

Now you might think it’s funny, but people come in to get saved and say, “Oh, I’ve got to change my life now. I’ve got the wrong husband. I really don’t like my kids. God is showing me I’ve got to move along.” (Laughing) And people honestly believe.... Well they don’t believe it, I don’t think, but they use the argument. Actually I had a lady one time come and say to me, “I married the wrong man.” I said, “Well, how do you know that?” She goes, “I got saved.” I said, “No, no, no. When you get saved, you get smarter. That’s a dumb thing to say.” But she was just sure now that she knew the Lord, man, the light was on, she was going to head into an entirely different direction.

Paul’s point here in these, what, seven, eight verses: stay where you’re at. Salvation brings you into a relationship with God that doesn’t require of you - in terms of relationship, marriage, your position in life - that you change or to act upon anything. You can be a widow, you can be a divorced person under the context or the word of unmarried. You can stay single as verse 9 suggested, though acknowledging that that isn’t for all. Apparently having been married, it is possible to stay single after you’ve been married. And that’s Paul’s point. You remember Anna. Her husband died after he and she had only been together for seven years. She was the one who waited in the temple when the Lord came to be dedicated. I think you read, there in Luke, that she was 84 years old (Luke 2:36-38). She was 84, but she’d only been married for seven years and spent the rest of her life single, serving the Lord, placing herself in that position. The point is that any situation from your life prior to coming to Jesus is considered by Him to be a part of your old life. There’s nothing you need to do to go back to fix things or correct things or change things. “Oh, I gotta do....” You don’t. Stay wherever you’re at when the Lord finds you. “If any man’s in Christ, he’s a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). And God looks at it that way. From that day forward you have an obligation to obey and seek His will. But until you come to the Lord, hey, it’s all sin, it’s all darkness. But when you come out of that life, then we find that the Lord puts our sins away as far as the east is from the west. He removes our transgressions (Psalm 103:12). He remembers them no more. So you get a new start, but you’re not obligated to go back and try to begin to change something at all.

What grace God gives to us, He now finds us different. Our past actions have been forgiven, sins removed. But now you're accountable. So at least the time that you've come to the Lord, now God opens your eyes, gives you His Spirit, and He now begins to account for you and seek of you the obedience and the desire to serve Him; that that work of God in your heart begins to accomplish. At that point, if I was divorced or widowed as an unbeliever and I am now saved, I am free to get married again. "Well, I've been there before." "Yeah, but you were lost. Your life is new in Christ." So you get to the end of the chapter – this chapter – and it says you're free to marry but make sure you get married "only in the Lord" (verse 39). Paul emphasized that. I think there's that 2 Corinthians 6:14 passage about us being unequally yoked together with unbelievers and what fellowship does light have with darkness and all. Come out from among them. When you come to the Lord, that part of your life, that's taken care of. Not that your sin and your failures won't be taken care of, but now you have a different mandate; now you've got to begin to walk in obedience. All that is rearview mirror; it's been taken care of. It's so good to know.

So Paul says, in verses 8 and 9 (where we just started with), if you find yourself in that state of singleness, great. If you want to get married, great. And it's an aorist imperative which means it's almost a command. Just make a decision here what you feel the Lord wants you to do. But He doesn't want you to burn, inflamed with passion. Right? If you're in love and burning, getting married is honorable, and it is acceptable in the Lord's sight, and it is certainly the solution to fulfill those needs and those desires. Years from now, Paul will write a couple letters to Timothy when Timothy takes over the church that Paul is planting now while he writes this letter in Ephesus. And he gives him a whole chapter, or for us at least, of directions there in 1 Timothy 5 about how to deal with the young widows in the church. Because, again, it's the reality of life. And he said, "If they're young in the church, you've got to help them really wait upon the Lord to get married again." And it is in the context that the church had a roll of widows that they would financially take care of; folks that were on their own. There's a whole list of requirements there in 1 Timothy 5; you can read them yourself. Had to be a certain age, had to have a certain involvement in the church, had to prove themselves as faithful, had to be walking with God in a way that everyone understood. He said, "If we take the young widows in and we don't encourage them to go back to work, get back into society, get involved in social relationships, we're going to find that, because we're paying their way and taking care of their needs, they're going to walk from house to house, and they're going to be gossips, and they're going to be idle. And so we think they should be encouraged to get married and have children and manage their house so that there's no opportunity to speak reproachfully about these young widows."

So, there's some direction, if you will, later on in the book of Timothy to the younger widows as opposed to the destitute, older women that really needed the care. But for them as for everyone else, here're the rules that apply: if you get married, once you're saved, make sure you marry somebody only in the Lord. Paul, like I said, would emphasize that about having fellowship light with darkness.

If you read through the Old Testament – and if you’ve been with us for any length of time, we’ve gone through it enough – one of Israel’s greatest difficulties in their history was allowing the unbelievers to intermarry with the children of God. It always led them away from God, it always led them into places of great danger, it always undermined the relationships that they had with God. Solomon’s later life was turned away from the LORD by his unbelieving wives (1 Kings 11). He loved a lot of foreign women, and it says when he was older, his foreign wives turned his heart away from the LORD.

So Paul’s very wise. Look, when you come to the Lord, you’re free. Free to pursue – be single, get married, have kids, have that in your heart. Make sure that you find a believer. Marry only in the Lord because there are plenty of reasons to argue for that’s a destructive thing if you do anything else but that. It’s important that.... I think maybe on a big-picture level it’s important that we look at the world outside the church building here not as a place for fellowship. The world is not for fellowship. The world is for witness, the world is for outreach, the world is for ministry. The church is for fellowship, the church is for marriage, the church is for having those relationships. So that’s where you should be looking. Not out there. And it’s important, I think, to say it seems like every year there’s always a couple folks in the church who....they get involved with somebody that’s not saved, and then it isn’t long before they’re up to their ears in no longer being able to make a very clear decision. And so they’ll come in, and they’ll say, “I’m dating so-and-so.” And I’ll say, “Are they Christian?” “No.” “Well, then, what’re you doin’?” “Well, I don’t know. Just one thing led to another. But she’s so sweet, and I love her. I know she’s not saved, but she’s close. In fact, I think she knows the Lord in her own way.” You might as well just pull the wool over your eyes. You’ve just deceived yourself. So by then it is, unfortunately, oftentimes too late. You’re emotionally hooked to somebody that God has not chosen, you’re settling for less than His best. Your feeble arguments – and we’ve heard them all, I think, over the years – about, “There’s not too many people.....I don’t know.....I don’t know where to go.....the best I’ve been able to find.” Great. You keep talkin’ and ignore what the Lord said: get married only in the Lord.

Praise the Lord we are set apart from our past. But look, don’t seek to manipulate that truth. I had a guy – it’s a good thing I’ve been around for a long time, you’ll never figure out who these people are – that literally came and said, “I’m leaving my wife.” A Christian guy. I said, “What do you mean you’re leaving your wife?” He said, “I think when I got married, I really wasn’t a Christian.” “Well, you said you were all those years before when you got married here.” “I think I’m truly saved now, so I believe I can start over.” Well you can twist the Scriptures all your life, but if you want the heart of God and the wisdom of God, you go with a blank slate, saying, “Teach me, God. Fill in the blanks. Teach me Your ways.” If you start twisting God’s Word, and I’m telling you I don’t see it in any way worse than in relationships when people want to push their wishes and their conditions, and you’re no longer seeking the Lord, and God’s Word is no longer to your benefit, and all you want is your way, you can probably get your way. But know this: that’s not going to help you. And you’re not going to get away with it. He knows ALL things. So there’s a reason we turn to the Scriptures. Like I said, this isn’t

such a goosebump study. But if you come in for counseling, and this is one of your situations, this is probably what you're going to hear.

God's counsel to Christian couples in verse 10 and verse 11 – we can go back there now – is different than it is to the unmarried. And so he says, in verse 8, to the unmarried and to the widow, but in verse 10 he says, "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife." Really hard to misread these. It's pretty clear. Paul literally says, as he's addressing this whole marriage situation, "Look, if you're Christians and you're married, I've got no new information for you. I've got no exception clauses, I've got no help for you. Jesus taught you already about this." And notice he calls Jesus' commands, not suggestions. And go to Matthew 5, go to Matthew 19, go to Genesis 2. Divorce is not an option for Christians. It shouldn't be. Malachi 2:16, "God hates divorce." It doesn't say God doesn't like it; He hates it! I always think when God says He hates something, you ought to go, "I should probably hate that as well."

So Paul, here, does not cover the exception clauses that Jesus spoke about in the gospels, for the goal here is to encourage the church to stay married. Even the exception clause, and I think we talked about that last week – that Jesus said Moses allowed just because of the hardness of your heart. If you go read the book of Hosea, which describes the love of our Father in heaven but especially the Lord to you, the church, and, in that context, to Israel, His people, they were very unfaithful. They were as unfaithful as they could be, and the LORD said, "I just want to bring you back. I want to hold you in My arms again. I want to love you like....I remember when we used to walk together, and everything was awesome. They're not like that now." And He had every right to put them away, but He didn't. Because there's an even better thing than divorce: grace and mercy and repentance is far better, and restitution, if you will.

I also want you to notice, in verse 11, that the words "but even if she does depart" is written in a past tense action. It's not suggesting that you have a choice. In other words, it is the will of God that you don't. But if you did, if you have, then you should stay on your own. You really have no opportunity, if you will, to replace whatever, whoever you've left behind. In fact, the separation which is referred to in verse 11 is hardly ever beneficial, in my experience, to a troubled marriage. If there's violence, sure. If the husband's dealing drugs out the back door, we'll get you out of there right now. This guy's not pleased to dwell with you, he needs to be on his own. If he lifts a hand to hurt you, we'll come help you. That's not what he's talking about. But the general popular belief is we just need a little separation to overcome this distress. Absence does not make the heart grow fonder; it makes it become more comfortable with the lack of drama. So what might have been a daily conflict at home.... "We're going to get our own place for a while...." It won't be three months people go, "I'm not going back to that. This is a much easier way to live." You haven't dealt with anything. You haven't dealt with forgiveness, haven't dealt with your own spiritual life. You're just letting it go. And more often than not, separation leads to divorce.



So, unless there's a good reason to make that happen, we almost always counsel against it. Your heart will not grow fonder; it'll grow harder. People don't have to deal with the issues. They don't have to forgive each other. They don't need to pray together. They don't need to change. They don't need to work it out. It provides this false sense of peace, and it teaches avoidance. Here's how you deal with conflicts: just avoid it. We see that happen at church sometimes. People will go from a church to another church because in the church that they were at, they have a personality conflict. Well you go ahead and run, but you're going to run into another personality somewhere else. Unless you learn to work those things out, you're never going to be settled. If it's doctrinal, if it's sin, I get it. If God is directly moving you somewhere else, I get that too. But all this.... "I'm running....I don't like....they don't smile at me." Oh, well, too bad. Welcome to the family. Work it out. Same thing in a marriage situation, though, in many ways. And usually the separation prolongs the agony, keeping both folks from being together in a house where the Lord is to be the first one. Like I said, there're exceptions: criminal activity, abuse, those kinds of things.

But for believers who divorce and separate for the wrong reasons – which is about everything else – you have two options: you stay single or you go home. I can't....people go, "Well that seems very limiting." Here's what I say to people who get mad. "I didn't write it. I'm just reading it to you. If you want to take it up with the Author, that's up to you. But I didn't write it. But I believe He's right. He knows what He's talking about." Well, it's just not culturally relevant in these days." "Okay. Then you've mistaken the whole idea that God is interested in you today."

To support us in that willingness to follow these directions, God gives us His Spirit, gives us every resource we need to solve marriage problems if you're willing to humble yourself. I think that marriage counseling usually fails because there's at least one person who doesn't want anything to do with it. We've had a lot of people come in, and you can just tell one – maybe it's the woman, maybe it's the man – who wants to do the right thing, and the other person does not. Usually just look at you with death in their eyes. Or they'll do this, "Could I see another pastor?" because you're not telling them what they want to hear.

Needless to say, Paul says in verse 10, "This isn't my will, this is the Lord's will. This is the Lord's Word." Paul spoke as an apostle, and the doctrines that he presented were certainly from the Lord. In the end of 1 Corinthians 14 – we're not quite there yet – Paul will write and say to them (verses 36-38), "Did the word of God originally come to you? Or was it only you that it reached? If you think you're a prophet or you think that you're spiritual, you should acknowledge the things that I'm writing to you, that they are commandments of the Lord. If you want to be ignorant, be ignorant." Paul stood on his authority as an apostle and said, "These are God's words to His people, and you should follow them."

When you get to verse 12, notice something changes. He says this, "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to

live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.” From Paul’s new teaching now, because this isn’t something the Lord has addressed, we now come to these unequally-yoked marriages. “So I’m telling you, this is a word from me, the apostle, that the Lord didn’t cover.” Maybe someone in Corinth was telling those who had gotten saved it would be preferable to leave the heathen spouse behind, walk for the Lord; probably the argument, “It’s better for the children. You know, they don’t need to be around that loud person.” I’ve heard it in marriage counseling for years. “I’m married to a real heathen. He worships idols and cheats on his income tax, and he uses foul language, and he drinks like a fish. It’s all that the kids see. I’m choosing to leave him for their sake. I can smell sin in the house. That pig. I’m sure God doesn’t want me to hang around this child of Satan.” And so it goes. Just looking for an argument, a reasoning to do what God tells you not to do.

But I want you to read this carefully because, again, this isn’t politics where you can spin the words. This is just God’s Word to us, and it’s direct. Notice here that the key to these verses is whether the unbeliever chooses to stay with you, not the other way around. The only leaving allowed here in these verses is one initiated by an unbeliever. Now if you got saved, and you’re now so difficult to live with that even the lost don’t want anything to do with you, what kind of saved are you? Shouldn’t you be a better parent? Shouldn’t you be a better spouse? Shouldn’t you be a better friend? They can leave you; you can’t leave them. It’s interesting, verse 14, the promise that the Lord makes there. Because this is a promise you will find nowhere else in the Scriptures. In fact, throughout the Bible the warning is always the same: never be unequally yoked. Not with the world, not in your business, not with friends. Don’t have such an influence in your life from the unbelievers that they start to drag you down. But here it’s exactly the opposite. You hang around. You hang around. You have an influence here. In every other situation, God warns us about the influence of the unbeliever upon our lives. But here He says, “You, the believer in the household, in the marriage, are a sanctifying influence both to them and to your family. In fact, your influence will guard the life of your children.” What I usually hear is, “Oh, the kids.....we can’t pray. The kids hear the bad language. He won’t let me take them to church. Oh, he’s just a miserable nothing.” The beloved unbeliever.

There’s no time clause here either. I had a lady say to me years ago, “Do you really think God wants me to be miserable for the rest of my life?” So I did this, being sarcastic, “Yes, He does.” Of course not! But that’s exactly why we have to obey Him. His ways are the ways of peace and joy. “Well, he doesn’t really want to stay with me.” “Well, why do you say that?” “Well, I’m never home, I hate to cook, won’t clean. He’d better not touch me. And I’m with my friends at church seven days a week, serving the Lord.” “Well I can understand that he doesn’t want to be with you. Who would?” But in reality, shouldn’t a Christian spouse – husband or wife – be someone who loves the Lord and trusts His power, be the most amazing person to be with? Even if you’ve got problems. Shouldn’t a Christian boss be the best boss to work for? So read these

verses in light of all that you know of the heart of God for marriages, and be careful that you don't allow yourself or anyone around you to cheapen the verses by manipulating them to cover sinfulness. In reality, you were both – before you were saved – lost and living for yourselves. I can see that that could be a mess at home, but half the group now is saved. Fifty percent of the partnership is now hearing from heaven, has the light of God's Word, has the power of God's Spirit. It can only get better, not worse. Jesus is now in your home, and He has your attention. How much better could it get? "Oh, yeah, well that unbelieving husband of mine....."

I would also add to you, before we get to the end of these verses tonight, that the fact that these verses are here should highlight the difficulty of marrying an unbeliever. Don't go into this relationship that way because God would like to have you avoid it, at the easiest. However, if you're in that place, you get saved, you have a mission field, a ministry at home, all on your own. God's going to use you in great ways.

Verse 15 says this, "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister" (the believing partner) "is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know," Paul says, "O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?" What if the unbeliever departs despite the best efforts and love that you have been able to show them? Paul, in very decisive words, says, "Then good riddance." It's very severe, it's very final. As a believer, if you'd done all that you can to serve the Lord, waiting upon God, and this guy or girl just defiantly wants nothing to do with you, and they bail, you've done everything you can, hey, you're free. No longer in bondage. You're free to get married again, to move on with your life. God has shut that door. Like chapter 7 of Romans, verse 2, where it talks about being bound to your husband as long as he's alive, but if he dies, you're free from that law, you're free from that unbelieving relationship. If there is.....it's like death or abandonment by an unbeliever ends a relationship, and go to verse 39 again; you're free to marry again, only in the Lord.

Now here's where the rub takes place, and I'm telling you again from a pastor's perspective because, like I said, this is one of those tools you put on the shelf and only pull out when you need it. There's not too many memory verses in here. Right? Or I'm not gettin' this tattooed on my arm tomorrow. "Shall I not depart or burn...better to burn...." No. You don't do that. (Laughing) It's counsel for counseling and direction.

So here's where the rub comes. In order for this to work, you have to become the best wife or husband that you can be. And what we find so often is because people don't really want to stay in that marriage, they tend to go down roads that they shouldn't go down, and they begin to have that holier-than-thou, head-in-the-clouds kind of contentious relationship with their spouses where, after a while, it's just impossible to live with them. Putting Scriptures on his beer can is probably not the best way to go. "Enjoy that all the way to hell, you worthless sinner." You can't do that kind of stuff. "Honey, can you make love with me tonight?" and you hear, "Oh, no way. No way, you sinner. I'm fasting and praying for the next six months. I'm sorry. I'm not available." It's not exactly doing ALL that you can. But you can use the Scriptures any way you

want. If you want God's Word, it's very direct, very clear. You can't mistake what is being said. Now you can argue with it it's not contemporary, that was then, this is now. But I would say to you this is always now and always will be.

I read a story many years ago of a wife who was married to a husband who had two boys in their 20's who would, on the weekend, just go out and just get drunk with his sons. And they would come home - and she loved the Lord - and kick in the door at 3:00 in the morning and demand breakfast. And she would faithfully get up and make breakfast and clean up after them and ask them if they were happy before she went back to bed. And she happened to tell one of her friends that, and her friend was just furious. "What in the world would you do something like that for?" And she says, "Well, you know, I love the Lord, and for me, in this relationship this is as bad as it's ever going to get for me. But unless they get saved, this is as good as they'll ever have it. And I want the Lord to be seen in my life."

If you can see a spouse walk away from you because you've done all that you can, you've given it your all, and you can honestly say before the Lord, "I've given it my all, I've been pure and loving and godly and devoted," then you are free. But I can't answer that question for you. You'll have to do that. And you should know God hates divorce, and He loves restitution in relationships.

And I believe verse 15 is maybe one of those exception clauses that can be applied from time to time, but it is so easy to misuse. And so I would just say God knows your heart, and if you're trying to work the system, I wouldn't. Because the counsel of God, which leads to life, is....you've just kicked to the side. You've not allowed it to give you wisdom. If you want to be sure, when an unbeliever leaves, that God has allowed them to move on and set you free, then you'll do everything you can to keep them and be a witness to them. If your conscience is clear, great. But here's what happens. Under emotional distress, manipulation becomes a tool, and it can be a difficult one. So, when Jesus was reviled, He did not revile. He committed Himself to the Father who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23). I think that's what the Lord is looking for.

The whole thrust of verses 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 is that we have a great influence in less-than-ideal circumstances if we can walk with God and let Him use us with His love. I love verse 16. "How do you know if this isn't going to work in your house? How do you know that that wayward husband or wife isn't going to come to Jesus? How do you know?" And it's written in a way like, "You don't know!" I don't know. I don't know. I do know, in my own life, when my first wife passed away when she was very young, and my dad watched me, he waited for me to freak out. I was a Christian. I did a lot of drugs before I got saved. He figured I was going to run back to the old crowd, and I just ran back to church. And he didn't say anything for the better part of eleven years, but when he got saved, he said, "I watched you didn't fall apart. I knew what you had was real." How did I know? I didn't know. I didn't know he was watching. He just seemed like an angry man most of the time. But how do you know? "Oh, my wife. She's so awful." But how do you know? You only know if you do what God says, and then He can bring the reaction and the response and the conclusion to that whole thing.

So we've already looked at verses 17 through 24, the remain in the status that you find yourself. The rest of the verses are really Paul's summary verses, if you will, and he adds the virgins to his commentary, if you will.

Verse 25, "Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress – that it is good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you." Here we go back to Paul's conviction that time was of the essence. Devotion required time. The Lord could fully use those who had nothing to take away from their time. But he's always saying, "I realize that's not for everybody. I realize it's not for everybody." You can't fault him for trying. And if you're called to it, I guess you can say "Amen" with a loud...and get the flag. But if not, you just go, "Well, that's good for you, Paul, not for me."

As far as being married, my wife and I have been married 44 years. I would hate to be young and single. She's the only one who really likes me. (Laughing) I know all you pretend to like me, but I know better. She is....you know, I couldn't have made it without her. So, hey, if you can be single, I guess that's great. But I'm not of....I'm the marrying kind. I need help in just about everything. And then my wife goes, "Well, did you marry a servant?" I go, "Honey, iced tea?" "Oh, sure, honey, I'll just get it." We kid around all the time, but I'd hate to be on my own.

But notice Paul's conviction is, "Hey, look, it's going to take a lot of time. For those virgins who've never been married, as God leads, marriage will bring difficulty," Paul says. And Paul said, "I'll spare you the difficulty." I suspect he had some bad taste in his mouth, maybe from what he'd gone through himself. But more importantly, he really is a believer that being unattached makes you the most available.

Verse 29, will go on with his arguments here, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away." See, Paul's whole outlook in his ministry was: life is fleeting, work to be done, the things of God should be paramount in all of our lives. And that's certainly true no matter where you're at. Redeeming the time to serve the Lord is easier when you don't have a lot of family responsibilities.

We see folks all the time in church – they're very involved, they get married, they have kids, and they're still here, but they're not doin' much because they have to chase these kids around and feed 'em and take 'em to ball games. It only takes about thirty years of your life to raise kids anymore; they never leave home now is what I'm told.

So....(Laughing) My kids got to be 18, they go, "I can't wait to leave," and we can't wait to have you leave! It was different. No, that's not true.

So, Paul makes a good point. Right? Any distraction that slows you down is not helpful to the cause of the kingdom of God. So he makes a very clear comparison: if you're married, maybe you should behave in serving the Lord as if you're not. I know, for years, my wife and I have been in ministry together for almost 45 years. We made an agreement years ago that if I was called to go speak somewhere that, regardless of what we had planned, we would put that first. Or if she was asked to do something that we put ministry before what we were.....in our relationship.....that that would be something that we would do so together. And, for the most part, we've been able to keep that promise. For the first two years of our relationship, when Pastor Chuck was still alive and we were over there a lot, Chuck used to put those cassettes out. Right? It was 2000 series or 3000 series. And Chuck was a remarkable teacher, but he was remarkably slow. So we had a cassette player that we could actually put the speed almost up to 2. But we made a commitment to each other that, for the next three years, we would go through the entire Bible together at night whether we got home at 3:00 a.m. or at 3:00 in the afternoon. And except for four days, we did that. So I think there have to be decisions that you make together, that God's Word and His ways can be accomplished in your life, and even the joys of being married don't have to interrupt or stand in the way of those things that God has given you to do.

But notice Paul's not just talking marriage. His argument is far bigger than that. It's kind of like any distraction – your tears, you're happy, you've got a lot of stuff, or you wish you do – we'll see that even with families, people.... You say, "Hey, are you at church?" "Oh, it's family night, it's church night, it's this night. The kids gotta get...." It's always the night before.....always Wednesday night they have to have a project in on Thursday. There's a way the enemy, I think, works in that kind of stuff as well.

He goes on, in verse 32 (we're getting to the end, and I think my voice is gonna make it), "But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord – how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world – how he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman" (in reference to the virgin) "cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world – how she may please her husband." So, verse 35, "And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you," (well, that's good) "but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction." I think Paul's pretty clear. If you've been called, then you get married. If not, you're single. But you've got to realize, getting married, as blessed as it is, can certainly get in the way of service. You think you want to be a missionary to Africa, and you've got seven kids at home, you're not goin' anywhere. Probably. Now you can be a missionary on your knees and pray every day for the missionary that can go. But it's usually the unfettered person that can go. Not always the case. But certainly this whole idea of interruption, if you will, or divided interests or preoccupations – there's no unholiness there. It just is what it is. And there're some advantages to serving the Lord, being single. I would say

to you from my life, it's been a great advantage to serve Him and being married. And Paul's not here to defend himself, so I'm right.

Verse 36, "But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his" (unmarried daughter) "virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry." Now, again, a very different system. Verse 37, "Nevertheless, he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better." Of all the years we've been going to Israel, we, for years, stayed at the Dan Panorama outside Jerusalem. It was a great place so you could walk downtown and also through the Old City. But the Dan Panorama, which is a really pretty hotel, 5-star hotel, if you go at night, you find the Hasidic parents bringing their children to meet each other for the first time. So you see the boy all dressed up and the girl all dressed up, and they are lookin' really uncomfortable. And there are seven or eight tables along the window that they actually keep people out of so they can do this matchmaking, dating thing. And it's fun to sit across the way, just watch these guys sweat. It's the inadvertent laughter and giggle that doesn't fit and the smiles that something didn't seem funny. I can just imagine. But, certainly, for a father who was interested in his daughter's well being, if he could talk her into staying single, it's all right. If you can support her because he sees this is going to be a good relationship, that's all right. Paul, I think, is trying to cover just be a good dad. Right? Give them a guide towards where they are called.

And finally, verse 39, "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment – and I think I also have the Spirit of God." Okay, Paul. Don't lean too hard on me now. "The Spirit of God is upon me." This is really what we need. So, I'm pretty sure it addresses most situational issues. You can manipulate this a lot. People do it. But if you're sincerely in a hard spot, and you go, "I want to know what God wants and what does the Bible say," I think you'll get clear direction here. But, like I said, this is a reference book you just put it on the shelf. Pull it down when you need it. No goosebumps. But next week, goosebumps. So read ahead, would you? I love the chapters of liberty and your conscience. It has a lot for us to learn from today.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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