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## Valuing the Sanctity of Marriage – 1 Corinthians 7:8-16

- Have you ever tried to help something, or protect something, but inadvertently did more harm than good?...
- it wasn't a matter of your heart not being right – you really wanted to help – it's just that your steps were misguided...
- I wonder how many people here this story from your childhood – the day you found a nest of baby bunnies...
  - do you remember that?...
- **[pics 1-4 – click as you go through the story]...**
  - many you found them in a bush, or in the woods or something...and as far as you could tell--the mamma bunny wasn't around (probably because you scared her off without knowing it...)
  - but what did you do next?...you went into rescue mode...and there was absolutely nothing wrong with your heart...but you were going to save those bunnies...
  - so you went tearing off back to your house – mom, we need a box...and we need a blanket...
  - so you go back to the nest...and you pick the bunnies up, and you hold them, and then your sister holds them...and then you hold them again...
  - and you lay out the blanket just right in the box, and you put them in their, and you medivac the little guys back to your house...
  - and then the emergency room procedures begin...
    - you get a little bowl of water and try to make them drink from it...and of course you drop one in the water but you're trying...
    - then off course every bunny in the world eats lettuce...even though they're three years old...so you've got mom's head of lettuce she was going to use for tonight's salad out there...
    - and without a doubt, some carrots---everybody knows rabbits eat carrots---Bugs Bunny sure did...so you're trying to get them to chew on this full size carrot...
  - then there's the exercise piece...someone needs to teach them how to walk...it may as well be you...
  - and then you take your afternoon nap together...you are totally focused on trying to save the lives of these bunnies...and what happens two days later?...they die...and then you have to plan the memorial service...it was a trauma in your childhood...has anyone here ever done that successfully?...it never works...
- what's the point – you tried to help...but inadvertently, you did more harm than good...
  - now, why am I raising this question?...not to have a healing of everyone's bad bunny memory (thank you, PV—I feel so much better now...)
  - that story allows me to then ask you this question...is it possible for us to make that same mistake theologically...or on the positions we take as Christians, or as a church?...
    - we want to protect something...we want to help...but we end up doing damage?...
- the answer to that is absolutely...and the example I'd like to study with you this morning is the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage...
  - here's the point – many of us might think that the best way to promote the sanctity of marriage is to believe that divorce is always wrong, and remarriage should be strictly forbidden...

- and if we held that view – I think for the most part it would not be judgmental toward others (at least I hope not)...it would be an attempt to take a strong stance on the sanctity of marriage...
- but here's what I believe – taking that position is very much like trying to rescue the baby bunnies by taking them home with you...
- there's at least 2 rather large problems with the no divorce, no remarriage position...
  1. One is – you have to ignore or explain away significant places in the Word of God that teach otherwise...so you are at odds with the Scripture which is a really bad place to be...
  2. Secondly, it ignores some of the heinous ways some married people choose to behave in their marriage...
    - and for some people – that position becomes their license to sin against their spouse in all sorts of significant ways – with the excuse – well, you can't do anything about my abuse, you can't do anything about my infidelity...because your Bible and your church teach that there are never legitimate grounds for divorce...
    - do you see what just happened there – a position that at first glance might appear to be a strong stand on the sanctity of marriage just had the opposite effect...
    - you put the bunnies in a box and they eventually died...
- this morning, we want to talk about **Valuing the Sanctity of Marriage God's Way**...
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 7...page 133 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- now, the last 2 words on that title are really important...the real question here is, what does God's Word say about this issue?...
  - and we've actually been accused of having a weak view of marriage because we believe Scripture teaches that there are grounds for "biblical divorce" and biblical remarriage...
  - but we think the exact opposite is the case – for one thing, if Scripture teaches it, we're not going to try to explain it away in an attempt to help God out...the strongest position is always the one God's Word teaches...regardless of how it might appear to man...
  - but as I alluded to a moment ago – any position that gives a married person the license to do whatever they want where their spouse has absolutely no recourse is the one that truly weakens or cheapens the institution of marriage...
  - we're going to talk about that today...
- now, let's back up for a moment and talk about the big picture...
- Our theme this year is **Taking the Next Step, with Joy**.
  - we're working our way verse by verse through the book of 1 Corinthians...
- one of the things I love about this book is that it covers so many different topics that are incredibly practical...Paul was talking to a group of people who had a lot of growing to do (kind-of like us, huh?), so he is giving them clear, understandable truth to help them take the next step in their relationship with Christ...
- now, one of the questions I could/should ask you is...are you taking the next step?...
  - for example, we discussed human sexuality last week...and God's very clear teaching about how that area of life is to function between men and women who are married...
  - I even gave the married couples here homework...because I really love you...
  - well, there's an obvious question now – did you do your homework...
  - that's what taking the next step looks like...
  - and, did you do it with joy – believing in your heart that God's way is best...even when it causes you to make significant adjustments to the way you're living...

- now, this morning we want to take the next step in the way we think about marriage...
- now, I should probably warn you – there is a lot of content here...because this is a very nuanced discussion that has a lot of twists and turns...
- but the goal here is to identify practical take-aways whether you are married or single to help you handle the status the Lord has given you in a way that honors him, and to relate to other people in our church and community in a way that pleases God as well..

**- read 1 Corinthians 7:8-16.**

- so we're talking about **Valuing the Sanctity of Marriage God's Way**, and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **Counsel from God's Word to 4 classes of People Regarding Marriage.**

**I. If You Have the Gift of Singleness, Rejoice in It – vv. 8-9.**

- Paul mentions 2 different kinds of persons in verse 8 – the unmarried, and the widows...
- now that might make you scratch your head because you'd say – but, aren't widows unmarried?...
- and before you can fully figure that out, if you read further in the text, in places like verse 25, you actually find a third category...virgins...
- so let's try to make some sense of all of that...

**A. The three kinds of persons described in this chapter.**

- **Virgins (cf. v. 25) – Women who had never been married**

- **Widows – Women whose spouse had died**

- well, then who would "the unmarried" be?...if you're not a widow and you're not a virgin, what are you?...

- **Unmarried – Women who had been divorced**

- now, there's a lot we could say about that – but here's a couple of quick observations:
  1. God cares about people as individuals...everybody has a story, and He doesn't want people treated as if their situation is the same when it's not...
  2. God also cares about clarity...he wants to be sure that these questions are answered properly so men and women know how to function in the church...

- by the way, in case you weren't here last week...let me repeat a very important point we discussed about these verses that significantly affects how we interpret them...

- if you look back up at verse 1 for a second, you see that Paul began all of this with the phrase, "now concerning the things about which you wrote..."

- in other words, what we are studying now is Paul's answers to specific questions the Corinthians had posed to him...

- so he's not giving a comprehensive discussion of any of these topics---you have to keep that in mind – that's why thinking about – what kind of literature are we studying is so crucial...this is specific answers to specific questions...

- now, what are the points of verses 8-9?...

**B. Don't succumb to pressure to marry if that is not God's will for you.**

- **v. 8 – it is good for them to remain even as I...**

- now, you have to do some reading in between the lines here...

- most students of Scripture believe Paul at one time was married...that was actually a requirement to participate in the Jewish Sanhedrin, a group to which Paul once belonged...

- there's also an allusion to a woman in Romans 16:13 that many believe was Paul's mother-in-law...
- now, Paul is clearly single or this verse would make no sense at all...and we believe his wife probably died...
- but the overall point is – it is good for such persons to remain unmarried...(same word as “good” in verse 1)
- that is a perfectly acceptable position to remain in even if there is all sorts of pressure to do otherwise...
- and it is really important for singles to learn to find their joy and satisfaction in their relationship to Christ...
  - even if that person will eventually be married, if they take the position that I am going to find a mate that will bring me joy, happiness, and satisfaction...that is a recipe for failure...
  - because you are asking more of your spouse than he/she can ever deliver...
- a good example of this, by the way – is an elderly woman named Anna...do you remember her?...
- she's part of the Christmas story...and the Scripture tells us... **Luke 2:36-38 -- And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.**
- that's what rejoicing in the gift of singleness looks like...

- however, aren't you glad for the great balance Paul puts on all of this...

### C. Such persons choosing to be married is not wrong.

- **1 Corinthians 7:9 - But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.**
- the point is – we should not insist that single people become married, nor should we judge single people who get married...
- and there isn't anything about – well, a certain number of months or years needs to elapse...or this or that...
- promote the sanctity of marriage in part by not legalistically judging singles or adding rules to their status...

- now, the subject totally switches in verse 10 [read 10-11]...

## II. If You Are Married to a Believer, Don't Divorce – vv. 10-11.

- we know that these 2 verses are talking about a marriage between 2 Christians because of the logic of verse 12 – “but to the rest” ... where Paul goes on to describe a situation where a believer is married to an unsaved man or woman...
- so in these 2 verses, we're talking about a marriage between Christians...
- now, you might wonder about the phrase in verse 10...

### A. The meaning of “I give instructions, not I, but the Lord”?

- that's important, because in verse 12 Paul says – “I say, not the Lord...”
- we'll get there in a minute...
- but Paul's point in verse 10 is...Jesus specifically addressed this topic...

- **Matthew 19:5-6** - **'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."**
- of course Jesus was quoting Genesis 2:24 in part...and then adding, what God has joined together...

## **B. Command – Don't divorce.**

- followers of Christ need to find ways to communicate and solve their problems with one another...
- so Paul is not saying – you're stuck in a bad marriage – but the solution to problems in marriage is to communicate and work them out biblically and if you can't do that, get help from others in the church who can assist you and walk through those problems with you...
- now, you might wonder...well,

### **1. Where did divorce even originate?**

- some people would wrongly answer – God instituted it...that is not true – that's comes from a misunderstanding of Deut. 24:1...
- **Deuteronomy 24:1** - **When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house...**
- some people read that verse and say – see, God instituted divorce...that's not the case...
- sinful men were already divorcing their wives, for little or no reason, and putting those women in a very vulnerable position in that culture...
- so God regulated it, so that the woman had a certificate of divorce and some of her rights and privileges were protected...
- but Jesus explained in **Matthew 19:7-8** - **They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.**
- in fact, God's summary of this is in **Malachi 2:16** - **"For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel...**
- now, I'm going to balance that in a minute, because there's a huge exception to all of this...but...the point is still the point – if you are married to a believer...do not divorce...now, I think we need to see this...

### **2. This command gives hope.**

- The Lord would never call us to something that was not in our best long-term spiritual good...
- some people quit at the very time they are on the cusp of taking a new step in their walk with Christ that can only be learned by finding ways to communicate and solve problems...
- the person who has been married 5 times for an average of 8 years each does not have 40 years of marriage experience...they have 8 years of marriage experience 5 times over...
- God will never call you to something that He will not also provide strength and grace for the journey...

### **3. This command calls us to commitment.**

- I want to challenge every person in this room to make a decision that you are going to make your marriage work...
- and if you say – I’ve violated some aspect of these verses...I’ve been married x number of times...
- listen, we’re not here to judge you – and there’s all sorts of things about all of our pasts we wish was different but we cannot change...
- but whoever you’re married to now – commit yourself to doing everything in your power to make that a great marriage...
- my wife and I made a decision long ago that we would never use the word divorce with one another...we’re about to celebrate our 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary— we’re far from perfect because I’m involved, but by God’s grace we have never threatened divorce---we’ve never said that to one another, and our kids have never heard us use that word in that way...
- and if you’re in the habit of doing that with your spouse in direct violation of these verses, here’s a message from heaven for you – knock it off – it’s sinful, wicked, and wrong and it should never be part of the way believers function with one another...
- and if you say – well, my spouse won’t communicate, he/she won’t even act like a follower of Christ...that’s when you need to get the leadership of the church involved...and some times, regrettably, the person will not repent and a loving church family has to discipline them...and by that act, are saying corporately that the person is not functioning like a believer...and then these verses don’t even apply to that marriage anymore...

#### **4. A word of caution for singles.**

- If God takes marriage this seriously, you need to be really careful before you marry someone...
- some singles sometimes have the view that the worst thing in the world is to be single...no, at least one thing far worse is to be married to a person who does not love Christ...
- now, are there any exceptions to this?...and here’s where we start getting into what some would suggest is a weak view of marriage on our part...but you have to ignore Jesus’ words unless you take this position...

#### **5. Jesus’ exception.**

- **Matthew 19:9 - “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”**
- **what’s the point there?...this describes one of the 2 possible reasons a Christian person could pursue a “biblical divorce...”**
  - repeated sexual sin on the part of the other person for which there was no repentance and change...
  - and in an ideal situation (in the sense that the proper steps were being followed)---such a person would first be disciplined by their church---and then the partner would be free to seek a divorce if they chose to (wouldn’t have to, but could...)
- now, here’s where we get to part of the crux of the message – some would say that’s weakening marriage...
- to which we would respond – allowing a so-called Christian person to commit repeated, and unrepentant sexual sin against his/her spouse with no consequences is what weakens marriage...

- I think some people take advantage of the fact that their spouse is a Christian...
  - they say/do things they would never say if they were in a non-Christian relationship because they know their unsaved spouse would either deck them, or divorce them, or both...
  - it is a terrible thing to take advantage of the fact your spouse is a Christian...and here's a place where Jesus draws a line in the sand...and says in effect, if you do that to your marriage, you don't deserve the spouse you were given...
- now, go back to the main point – what about those who should not have pursued a divorce, and did so anyway?...

### **C. Command to those who violated the first command.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:11 – (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.**
  - so, if a person deserts a marriage with no biblical grounds, he/she should remain unmarried...
  - now if you say – I didn't know that – I violated that principle – what now?...the answer is – ask God's forgiveness and seek to be a godly spouse to the person you're married to in the days ahead...
- now, all of that is important, but we still have 2 more important categories...

### **III. If You Are Married to an Unbeliever Who Wants to Remain in the Marriage, Don't Divorce.**

- we know that the subject changes because Paul says...
  - **v. 12 – But to the rest...**
    - all we have to do is read the next couple of verses and we know that he is now speaking about marriages where one person knows Christ and the other doesn't...
- now, I assume that something Paul said in verse 12 probably really caught your attention...

#### **A. Why, "I say, not the Lord."**

- Paul's point there is – we do not have any recorded teaching from Jesus on this subject...
  - now, you might say – then how does that affect our view of inspiration?...do we not have to take words like this as seriously?...do they have less credibility or weight than the ones Jesus spoke?...
  - of course not – in fact this is actually a strong case for inspiration...because Paul knew that as he wrote words with his apostolic authority, that they had equal weight compared to the words of Christ...

#### **B. The command – don't divorce.**

- when you think about it, that is an incredible statement for the apostle Paul to make...
  - which shows how highly he values marriage, that he would encourage people married to non-Christians to stay in those relationships...
- now, we should pause at this point and say – we have a number of men and women in our church family who are in this condition...and we are so glad the Lord has given you to our church family...
- and I would say to all of the rest of us---we need to recognize how challenging it would be to be in that situation – and we need to find every way possible to include them in every aspect of body life possible...

- now, Paul even gives the reasons for this command...

### C. Reason

- it is a powerful opportunity for evangelism and ministry...
- **1 Corinthians 7:14 - For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.**
- sanctify means “set apart...”
- and the point is – that unbelieving spouse is in the best possible position to repent and believe because he/she is living with a “walking picture of Christ” everyday in their home...
- that was Peter’s point...
- **1 Peter 3:1 - In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,**
- that’s not only true for spouse, but for your children as well...[develop how some would believe it would be better to get out of that marriage for the protection of the children – perhaps it would be best for your children to see a godly example of living with someone who does not love the Lord...]

- now, there’s still one more category...

## IV. If You Are Married to an Unbeliever Who Wants to Leave, Don’t Try to Force Them to Stay.

- the last portion of the passage provides the second reason for a “biblical divorce”

### A. Meaning of “consents to live with”

- [KJV – pleased to dwell with...]
- committed to having a civil, monogamous, marriage...
- if not, verse 15 says – the unbelieving person leaves [doesn’t always mean, leaves totally...develop – spouses who are in and out, spouses who abuse, spouses who won’t work, etc...]
- [develop – it is not a high view of marriage to expect a person to continue to live in a marriage like that...]

### B. Command

#### v. 15 – let him leave

- don’t have to fight, manipulate, cajole...

### C. Provision

- **v. 15 – the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases**
- free to remarry