

Divine Guidelines for Marriage

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:8–16

Code: 1829

INTRODUCTION

A. The Present Problem

It is very difficult to maintain a marriage in today's world. There are nearly as many divorces as marriages, and the statistics continue to skyrocket. Love today is loudly acclaimed and sought after, but it is not much evident—even within many marriages.

B. The Past Predicament

Unfortunately, marriage problems are not a new phenomenon. They were an historical problem as well. It is something that has always been around. Marriage problems were rampant in New Testament times, especially in the Roman Empire.

The church in Corinth was severely afflicted with all kinds of marital conflicts. The seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians was written to answer the questions that arose as a result. The apostle Paul addressed the Corinthians' needs, misconceptions, and misbehavior.

1. The confusion

The Corinthian Christians were confused because some were saying it was better to remain single to be more spiritual. They had a growing fascination with celibacy and thought that if they remained single, they would be able to give a higher devotion to God. They assumed that would move them to a higher plain of spirituality and even went so far as to say any kind of sex was wrong. That caused many Christians to divorce their spouses for so-called "spiritual reasons" or to remain married but withdraw from any physical contact to devote themselves totally to God. The Jewish leaders on the other hand had propagated their belief that you had to be married to be godly and that if you weren't married, you were out of God's will and excluded from heaven.

2. The characteristics

Several questions naturally arose in the Corinthian church:

a) Is marriage a command? b) Do you have to be married to please God? c) Should single people marry or is it more spiritual to stay single? d) Are you a more devoted Christian if you are not married? e) Should married people who have subsequently come to Christ abstain from all sex? f) Should a Christian married to a non-Christian get a divorce?

C. The Previous Principles

In 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 we studied the general principles regarding marriage.

1. Marriage is good

Paul affirmed that marriage is normal. It is for the majority. God designed the institution of marriage. It is intended for those who cannot otherwise avoid sexual involvement. That does not mean you should go out and get married immediately just because you can't control your desires. Paul is saying that those who have a desire for sexual fulfillment most likely do not have the gift of singleness.

2. Marriage is not for everyone

Marriage is good, but it is not an absolute commandment for everyone to obey because God has given some the gift of being single (v. 7), which is the ability to totally control sexual desire. If you have been gifted with singleness, you have a unique gift of God that should be used for His glory. Those who have the gift of celibacy have a special blessing of God that should be maintained

because it puts you in a position to be used by Him in a very unique way.

In verses 8-16 Paul supplies answers to four different groups of people: (1) those who were formerly married (vv. 8-9); (2) those who are married to believers (vv. 10-11); (3) those who are married to unbelievers who want to remain married (vv. 12-14); and (4) those who are married to unbelievers who want to leave the marriage (vv. 15- 16).

LESSON

I. GUIDELINES FOR SINGLE CHRISTIANS (vv. 8-9)

"I say, therefore, to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn."

Formerly married people came to salvation in Christ and asked if they now had the right to remarry someone else. The unmarried (those divorced before coming to Christ) and especially widows, would desire their questions answered because of their past situation. Widows had known all the joys of marriage, but were now alone because of the trauma of losing their mate. The unmarrieds had also experienced marriage and had many questions about their future. Paul deals with each situation as the chapter unfolds.

A. The Ideal Plan

Paul's response to those who fit in this category is, "It is good for them if they abide even as I" (v. 8). Paul affirms that if you are divorced or widowed, it would be good if you remained single. The Greek word for "good" is kalos, which means "beneficial" or "excellent." Paul is saying, "Don't listen to Jewish leaders who are saying if you're not married, you're abnormal." Before we criticize the Jewish leaders too much, we need to realize that many well meaning Christians today do the same thing. We see a young person and we tell them they have to get married before it's too late. However, their singleness may be God's very best for their lives!

B. The Ideal Purpose

Single people are needed in Christianity to help fulfill the plan of God. It is all right if someone has the need to marry, but if someone has no interest in marriage and feels God has given him the gift of celibacy, let him fulfill what God intends to do through his life. Paul was speaking to "the unmarried" or people who were divorced before coming to Christ. They wanted to know if they had the right to marry again. His word to them was, "It is good for them if they abide even as I" (v. 8).

By that statement Paul affirms that he was formerly married because marriage seems to have been required for membership in the Sanhedrin, to which Paul may once have belonged; because he had been so devoutly committed to Pharisaic tradition (Gal. 1:14); and because he refers to someone who could have been his wife's mother (Rom. 16:13), we may assume that he was once married. His statement here to the previously married confirms that--"even as I." Perhaps he was a widower. He does not identify with the virgins in verse 25 but with the unmarried and widows, that is, with the formerly married. God gave Paul the gift of celibacy and with it the ability to be single and not be preoccupied with sex and marriage.

C. The Ideal Proposal

Paul continues his proposal for singleness in verse 25, "Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; yet I give my judgement, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful." Paul is communicating that the Lord Jesus never said anything specifically about virgins and never told anyone to get married. He simply spoke about the institution of marriage as it already existed. Yet, Paul is going to add revelation as one who had obtained mercy from the Lord. He says in verses 26-27, "I suppose therefore, that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife."

Paul was informing the Corinthian believers that from a practical standpoint, it would be to their advantage to remain as they were. Considering the sexually debauched society in which they lived,

the Corinthians were better off to remain in the state in which they came to Christ. If you are married, stay that way and if you are not, don't seek to be. Paul adds a comfort to those who desire marriage in verse 28: "If thou marry, thou hast not sinned." Paul is saying that it is no sin if a virgin marries, but it might be to his or her advantage to stay single. He says further in verse 28, "Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh; but I spare you." Paul is writing to spare them the trouble that marriage brings. Don't marry if it isn't a necessity for you. You won't sin if you do marry, but if God has given you the ability to be single, cherish that ability because of its lack of encumbrance. This is a very special gift that renders you capable of serving God in a unique way.

1. The pressure involved

There are many pressures in being single in today's society, especially with all the current emphasis on marriage and the family. It has been said that loneliness for single people is at its height during the holiday season. Many single parents often feel that way. But you don't have to feel that way. If God has given you the gift of celibacy, accept that as His plan. Since He is a loving and all-wise God, he has your best interest at heart, whether you recognize it or not. There is nothing wrong with being single, as Paul shows here.

2. The price involved

There are many advantages in being single. It provides many opportunities for service to Christ. It is wrong to force someone who is content with their singleness into questioning God about their desire to remain that way.

a) Matthew 19:10-12--Jesus was speaking to the disciples and they concluded it would be better to remain single. Jesus had just given some poignant statements concerning marriage and divorce. His disciples replied, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (v. 10). They concluded it would be better never to get married to begin with. Jesus responded positively, but reiterated that not all men could accept this statement--only those to whom it was given (vv. 11-12). The Lord indicated it would be good to stay single, but noted that everyone isn't designed for that. Being single affords much potential for service to the Lord. We should never take someone who is content in being single and force them into marriage. b) Luke 2:36-37--"There was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, who departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." This is one of the most beautiful stories associated with Jesus' birth and infancy. When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple to present Him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice, the prophetess Anna recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Her husband had lived only seven years after their marriage, and she remained a widow. At the age of 84 she was still faithfully serving the Lord in His Temple. She did not look on her lot as inferior and certainly not as meaningless. She had the gift of singleness and used it joyfully in the Lord's work. God may cause you to lose your partner by death, and He may also choose from that time on for you to never marry again. If God gives you the gift to be satisfied and at peace with yourself as a single person, even though you had once been married, accept that from God. There is nothing wrong with being single. You can have a fulfilled life of complete devotion to Christ.

3. The problems involved

Paul goes on to say in verse 9, "If they cannot have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." If a Christian is single but does not have the gift of singleness and is being strongly tempted sexually, he or she should pursue marriage. Paul was saying that staying single is not wrong, neither is becoming married and staying married. But in view of the "present distress"--the pressure from the world that was being applied to them--Corinthians believers who were single were probably in a much better position to remain as they were (7:25-28).

a) Man's sinful nature Many who feel they do not have the gift of celibacy often are frustrated because they can't seem to find a marriage partner. One of the problems could be that there is sin in

your life that needs to be dealt with. Perhaps God's Word is being violated and thereby disqualifying you from pursuing His will. It could also be that you have sinned in the past and you are now reaping the consequences of that sin.b) Man's selfish natureAnother problem that people face is being selfish. Don't be preoccupied with yourself; be preoccupied with the Lord. The best way to find the right person is to be the right person. If you are not the right person, you will never meet the right partner.

If you are living a righteous life and you do not have the gift of singleness, God will provide a partner for you. How could God want you to be married, and yet not provide a partner?

4. The precept involved

In verse 9 Paul gives a command to those who do not have the gift of singleness: "Let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." The Greek phrase "let them marry" is an aorist imperative command. Paul is saying, "Get married!" The phrase "to burn" means "to be inflamed," and is best understood as referring to strong passion (see also Rom. 1:27). A person cannot live a happy life, much less serve the Lord, if he is continually burning with sexual desire—even if the desire never results in actual immorality.

I believe that once a Christian couple decides to get married, they should do it fairly soon. Once you've made that kind of commitment, you put yourself in a position to be tempted and possibly compromise your standards. Marriage was designed to help you be fulfilled sexually. The practical problems of an early marriage are not nearly as serious as the danger of immorality. I do not advocate simply jumping into marriage for only one reason--sexual fulfillment--but there is no advantage to long engagements. In a day of lowered standards and constant suggestiveness, it is extremely difficult to stay sexually pure. Parents who encourage their engaged children to wait for several years before marrying also run the risk of putting them in a potentially tempting situation. If the true commitment is there for marriage, it is best to marry than to burn with passion.

What to Do While You Wait for Marriage?

There are several things Christians can do to control themselves sexually before marriage.

1. Channel your energy through physical work and spiritual ministry.

Idle moments do not help at all. We should avoid listening to, looking at, or being around anything that strengthens the temptation to sin sexually. Program your mind to focus only on that which is good and helpful (Phil. 4:8).

2. Don't seek to be married for the sake of being married.

You run a great risk of marrying the wrong person that way. Seek to love, and let marriage be a natural response. Seek to honor Christ in your life and in all your relationships, and let God bring about a marriage.

3. Let go of the sex-mad, adulterous world.

Be careful what you let into your senses--what you see, what you hear, and where you go. Whatever you allow in your mind is going to have a great impact on you.

4. Program your mind with the Word of God.

Your behavior is a direct result of what you put in your mind. Pray for purity and stay in the Word.

5. Count on divine enabling for you to live without sexual fulfillment.

Until God gives you the right person, He will provide strength for you to resist temptation. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (NASB).

6. Avoid potentially tempting situations.

Stay away from them, because even though you may feel you're innocent, you may not be able to control someone else.

7. Praise and thank God in the midst of your singleness.

Be content in what God is doing in your life now, not always being concerned with what will happen in the future.

8. Be accountable to a close Christian friend of the same sex.

Don't live alone, travel alone, or go places alone where you will be vulnerable. Stay accountable to someone who is mature and who understands your needs.

II. GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIANS MARRIED TO OTHER CHRISTIANS (vv. 10-11)

"And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband; But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife."

No distinction is made regarding the type of marriage involved. And as we saw in the last chapter, there were at least four marital arrangements ranging from the common-law *usus* to the noble Roman *confarreatio*. The phrase "unto the married" covers each type of marriage in the Roman system. The issue is not what kind of marriage you had, but staying in whatever situation you found yourself when you came to Christ. Paul must be speaking to Christian marriages in verses 10-11 because in verses 12-16, he deals specifically with marriages in which only one partner is a believer. Also, Paul never gave commands (v. 10) to non-believers, other than to repent.

A. The Lord's Command (v. 10)

Lest there be any question about Paul's authority, he quotes the specific commands of Christ concerning marriage and divorce. Quoting Genesis 2:24, Jesus said, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh they are no more two, but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:5-6). In all three passages concerning Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:3-9; Matt. 5:27-32; Mark 10:11-12), He explicitly commanded that marriage was to be lifelong. Jesus explained that God allowed Moses to permit divorce only because of the peoples' hardness of heart. Divorce was permissible only in the case of adultery (Matt. 5:31-32). God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). Divorce is contrary to God's plan for mankind, and when allowed in cases of adultery, is only a gracious concession to the innocent party in an irreconcilable case of unfaithfulness. Where there is repentance, there can always be restoration.

It is likely that some Corinthian Christians had decided they should get a divorce for "spiritual" reasons. Paul had to instruct them on the proper view of marriage or else many would use that excuse to rid themselves of the partner they didn't want. Paul was not discussing divorce based on adultery; Jesus had affirmed a provision for that (Matt. 5:32; 19:8-9). He was talking about divorce for any other reason—even supposedly spiritual ones.

B. The Apostle's Command (v. 11)

Some of the believers in Corinth had already divorced one another or moving toward that end. Paul instructs, "If she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife." Paul was explaining that if a Christian divorces another Christian, neither partner is free to remarry (except in the case of adultery). They must stay single or rejoin their former mate. In God's eyes that union has never been broken.

1. The reiteration

Except for fornication, (Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:1-9), there can be no divorce. The only grounds Jesus ever gave for the dissolution of marriage was sexual immorality. This is clear in the case of Joseph and Mary. Matthew 1:19 says, "Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately." Joseph was shocked when he found out Mary was pregnant. He knew they had had no relations and wanted to protect Mary from the embarrassment of being caught in adultery. Joseph had the option to divorce Mary if she had become pregnant by another man. Because Joseph was a just man, he desired to act righteously by

divorcing his wife, whom he thought had committed adultery. The wonderful thing was that the Holy Spirit had conceived within her the Christ child. Mary had been counted righteous as well.

2. The reinforcement

The case Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 does not discuss adultery. The command is that if a divorce occurred that was not on the basis of adultery, reconciliation or remaining single are the only options. If you have divorced already, then you must stay single or be reconciled to your husband. The union God had established was never broken. Corinthian believers who were endeavoring to be obedient to Christ were sure to attempt to be reconciled to their spouses.

III. GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIANS MARRIED TO UNBELIEVERS WHO WANT TO STAY (vv. 12-14)

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord, If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman who hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy."

A. The Questions

Another natural question that arose in the Corinthian church was whether new Christians were to remain married to non-Christians, especially those who were immoral and idolatrous pagans. Were they free to divorce the one to whom they were unequally yoked? In light of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, their bodies were now members of Christ and were temples of the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians were justifiably concerned about whether to maintain their marriage or divorce their mate to please the Lord. Some may have thought that to continue in their unequally-yoked relationship meant to join Christ to Satan, defiling the believer and their children, and dishonoring the Lord. The desire for a Christian partner would be very strong.

B. The Answers

The first thing that needs to be understood is that mixed marriages can be prevented if, as a Christian, you marry "only in the Lord" (v. 39). Mixed marriages are forbidden when they can be prevented. The idea of a Christian marrying a non-Christian is antithetical to Scripture (2 Cor. 6:14). The question Paul addressed is what happens when one of the spouses in a marriage relationship comes to Christ. What are they to do?

1. The authority

Jesus had not taught directly about this problem, and so Paul says, "To the rest speak I, not the Lord" (v. 12). This is not a denial of inspiration or an indication that Paul is only giving his own opinion. It is merely to say that God had not given any previous revelation on the subject, but Paul was now setting it forth.

2. The affirmation

Paul goes on to say, "If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman who hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him" (vv. 12-13). God doesn't want anyone to be saved and then use that as an excuse to divorce their spouse. The Corinthians were not to divorce their mate, even to marry a Christian.

The early Church was being accused of destroying family relationships by divorcing their spouses based on their newfound faith. Many unsaved husbands were upset when their wives were saved because for a woman change her religion apart from her husband was unthinkable. Each member of the household most often shared a common faith. Tertullian wrote about heathen husbands being angry with their Christian wives because they wanted to kiss martyrs' bonds, embrace Christian brothers and sisters, and go along the streets to the cottages of the poor to meet their needs. It is easy to sympathize with some unsaved husband or wife whose partner was not behaving as they

should. The apostle Paul's command is if you have a partner who doesn't believe in Christ but wants to stay with you, don't divorce him or her. Some might wonder, "Won't I become defiled by staying with my unsaved partner?" On the contrary!

3. The agency

Paul says, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy" (v. 14). Christians married to unbelievers were not to worry that they themselves, their marriage, or their children would be defiled by the unbelieving spouse. The truth is, the very opposite was the case. Both the children and the unbelieving spouse would be sanctified through the believing wife or husband.

In this context, the word "sanctified" does not refer to salvation; otherwise the spouse would not be spoken of as unbelieving. It refers to being set apart. The words translated "sanctified" and "holy" are from the same Greek root. The sanctification that Paul talks about here is matrimonial and familial, not personal or spiritual. You become personally and spiritually sanctified only when you believe in Christ. But having a Christian living in your home has a sanctifying influence on other the members of the family. One Christian in the home graces the entire home! Such a home is not Christian in the full sense, but it is immeasurably superior to one that is totally unbelieving. The indwelling Spirit and all the blessings and graces that flow into the believer's life from heaven will spill over to enrich all who are near.

Although the believer's faith cannot suffice for the salvation of anyone but himself, he is often the means whereby other family members come to Christ by the power of his testimony. For instance, two people in marriage become one flesh. Even if God blesses the one Christian, the unsaved will receive some of God's blessing as a result. Marriage to a Christian creates a relationship to God for the non-Christian, and even though it is short of salvation, it is far superior to pagan life.

A young woman came up to me after the service one Sunday morning and told me that when she was growing up, her grandmother was the only Christian in the family. The grandmother always spoke of her love for Christ and witnessed to the family in what she said and by what she did. Eventually, three of the four grandchildren came to know the Lord, and each one declared that their grandmother had the greatest influence on their decision for Christ.

a) Genesis 18:26--"The Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." When Abraham could not find that many, he pleaded with God to reduce the number to forty-five, then forty, and finally all the way down to ten. In each case the Lord agreed to spare the city, but not even ten righteous could be found. The point is that God was willing to bless many wicked people for the sake even of a few of His own people in their midst.b) 1 Kings 15:4--This verse says, "Nevertheless, for David's sake, did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem." God declared that because of David, He was going to bless Jerusalem. That city hadn't done anything to deserve God's blessing, but because of David's faithfulness, He would bless Israel.

Likewise, in a home where there is only one Christian, others in the home benefit from the blessings of God. If you are not a Christian but your partner is, you need to thank God that you live in a home where God is at work. It is similar to your spouse receiving a huge inheritance--you have nothing to do with it. You aren't even related to the giver; nevertheless, you receive the gift also. Paul is saying it is a blessed thing for an unbeliever to be married to a Christian. If you are a Christian and your partner wants to stay, let him stay and sense the blessing of God on your own life. Sanctifying matrimonial grace might lead to saving grace.

4. The advantage

Paul goes a step further in proving his point by arguing in reverse. He says, "Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." The Christian need not fear that his children will be defiled by the unbelieving father or mother. God promises that the opposite is true. They would certainly be unclean if both parents were unbelievers. The Lord guarantees that the presence of just one

Christian parent will help influence the children spiritually. It is not that their salvation is assured, but that they are protected from undue spiritual harm and are bound to receive some sort of spiritual blessing. Evidently, some of the Corinthians were worried that since their mate was not saved, they were defiling their children. If you and your children are subjected to a non-christian influence in the home, pray that God will use you as a godly influence to bring them to full faith in Jesus Christ.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIANS MARRIED TO UNBELIEVERS WHO WANT TO LEAVE (vv. 15-16)

"But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

A. God's Call to Part (v. 15a)

If an unbelieving spouse wants to divorce his mate, Paul's command is to "Let him depart." The Greek construction of the verb is in the middle voice which means, "If the unbeliever takes himself out of the marriage relationship, let him depart." This is a case where the unbeliever initiates the divorce proceedings. If that occurs, the Christian partner is not to contest it. The Greek word for "depart" is *ch[ma]oriz[ma]o*. It refers to divorce. The believer is not to fight the divorce.

B. God's Call to Peace (v. 15b)

Paul explains why the believing partner should not contest divorce proceedings: "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us to peace." In God's sight, the bond between a husband and wife is dissolved only by death (Rom. 7:2), adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:1-9), or an unbeliever's departure. Paul is saying that a divorce initiated by the nonbelieving spouse is permitted, especially when it occurs because of the believing spouse's testimony for Christ. You are free from the bondage of continuing in a marriage relationship with a spouse who is determined to leave. When a divorce occurs for that reason, or for the other reasons stated above, you are free to remarry. Throughout Scripture, whenever legitimate divorce occurs, remarriage is assumed. When divorce is permitted, remarriage is permitted. (However, it is clearly forbidden in the case presented by verse 11).

The reason for going through with a divorce initiated by an unbeliever is that "God hath called us to peace." One of the benefits of being a Christian is living a peaceful life with God. There is nothing that God needs less than constant fighting, tension, and frustration in the home. A home in turmoil is not God's objective for the Christian, nor is marriage primarily a foundation for evangelism. You cannot say whether you are going to lead your spouse to Christ or not (v. 16). You may even drive him farther from Christ. If he wants to leave, let him. It would be better to reject Christianity because of Christ, not because of your poor testimony.

C. God's Call to Patience (v. 16)

Paul deals with the obvious objection of the conscientious Christian in verse 16: "What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" Someone will invariably say, "If I don't keep my marriage together, who's going to reach my unsaved spouse?" Many Christians have tried to keep a marriage together even when the spouse was unbelieving and wanted a divorce, But that of course is against's God's will. A wife has no assurance that she will save her husband, and a husband has no assurance that he will save his wife. Regardless of a Christian's motives and hopes, the likelihood of leading the partner to Christ who is antagonistic toward the gospel is minimal. If the partner stays in the marriage unwillingly or reluctantly, the disruption of family peace is assured. This is a command and not an option.

It is God alone who saves people. And one thing that God has never needed is quarrelsome, angry, hostile homes in which to save people. Marriage is not primarily an instrument for evangelism, especially if the unbelieving partner wants to leave. The believer should let God pursue the spouse's soul with the message of salvation, and use whomever He wills to bring your spouse to faith in Him.

CONCLUSION

Throughout 1 Corinthians 7, the apostle Paul has given many guidelines concerning singleness and marriage. Some of the questions posed at the beginning of the lesson can now be answered:

1. Is marriage a command?

Marriage is not a command in the Scriptures. It is good to be married, but it is not commanded for everyone.

2. Do you have to be married to please God?

No. Pleasing God is as a result of obedience to Him, regardless of your marital status.

3. Should single people marry or is it more spiritual to stay single?

Paul affirms that it is good to remain single. It is a gift given by God to be used for His glory (but not one that everyone possesses).

4. Are you a more devoted Christian if you are not married?

No. If you have the gift of singleness, devote your life to Christ. But if you have difficulty controlling your sexual desires, then God probably intends for you to be married. If so, get married and devote your life to Christ.

5. Should married people who have subsequently come to Christ abstain from sex?

Paul clearly commands that those who are married are obligated to fulfill the sexual aspect of their marriage in every way. You are not to deprive each other of the need for sexual fulfillment.

6. Should a Christian married to a nonChristian get a divorce?

If you are married to an unbeliever who wants to stay, let him stay and let him and your children be graced with the blessing that comes from God through you. If you are married to an unbeliever who wants to leave, let him leave because God has called you to live a life of peace. Don't worry about saving the soul of your mate; that is God's job. It is likely that nagging your unbelieving spouse to stay reluctantly would further compound the problem, not help it. God knows about the situation and will work out His own way.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is Paul's purpose in writing the seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians?

2. What did the Jewish leaders believe about marriage?

3. Is marriage a command from Scripture? Explain your answer.

4. True or false: Those who have a strong desire for sexual fulfillment most likely do not have the gift of singleness.

5. What four groups of people does Paul address in verses 8-16?

6. Who are "the unmarried?" What is Paul's response to them and the widows in verses 8-9?

7. Single people are _____ in Christianity to help _____ the plan of God.

8. Explain why the apostle Paul had probably been married in the past.

9. What are the advantages of remaining single?

10. What are the potential problems of remaining single?

11. Several things were mentioned that could prevent someone from knowing whether or not they have the gift of singleness. What were they?

12. What are several things Christians can do while they wait for marriage?

13. What kind of marriage situation does Paul address in verses 10-11?

14. What was Jesus' teaching concerning marriage and divorce?

15. If a Christian divorces another Christian, not on the grounds of adultery, does he or she have the right to remarry someone else?

16. Are believers supposed to remain married to nonbelievers, especially those living with immoral and even idolatrous partners?

17. Can a person who is already a Christian before marriage marry a non-Christian? Support your

answer with Scripture.

18. What is meant by the unbelieving spouse or children being sanctified by the believing partner?
19. What is Paul's command to a believing spouse whose unbelieving partner wants to leave?
20. List the three grounds the New Testament gives for remarriage.
21. What reason does Paul give for not hindering an unsaved spouse who wants a divorce?
22. How would you respond to the person who says, "If I don't keep my marriage together, who's going to reach my unsaved spouse"?
23. Answer in your own words the following questions: Is marriage a command? Do you have to be married to please God? Should single people marry, or is it more spiritual to remain single?
24. What is God's view concerning sexual fulfillment with those who are married? Should a Christian married to a non-Christian get a divorce?

Pondering the Principles

1. The first principle discussed was the guidelines for single Christians in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9. Paul's recommendation to the formerly married and widows was that they remain single, as he did. Paul also recognized that if they desired marriage, they needed to marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with sexual passion. Are you a widow or have you been married in the past before coming to Christ? If either one is the case, ask God to make it clear to you what He wants to do in this regard. Consider Paul's recommendation to remain single. In whatever situation you eventually find yourself, devote the remainder of your life to serving Christ.
2. The second principle we looked at was the guidelines for Christians married to other Christians (vv. 10-11). The apostle Paul quotes the Lord Himself and states that at no time are Christians ever to divorce for any supposed spiritual reasons. Jesus stated that marriage is to be lifelong. Spirituality has nothing to do with your marital status. Paul also commanded that if divorce had occurred without biblical grounds, either remaining single or reconciliation were the only options. Have you divorced your Christian spouse on non-biblical grounds? If so, you are either to remain single or be reconciled to that person. If you've already violated the Lord's commands as a Christian by being illegitimately divorced and remarried, you have only one recourse--confess your sin, telling God and those you have wronged the sorrow of your heart, and remain in the union you are now in. See if God will not make something sweet out of the bitter.
3. The third principle covered in verses 12-14 is the guideline for Christians married to unbelievers who wanted to stay married. If you have been married before coming to Christ and your unbelieving spouse desires to stay with you, do not seek a divorce. You have a unique opportunity to be salt and light to that person. According to verse 14, you have the responsibility to be a sanctifying influence in your home, both to your spouse and children. Memorize 1 Peter 3:1-2, 7 and ask God to use you to help bring your loved ones to Christ.
4. The fourth principle is in verses 15-16, and it is the guidelines for Christians married to unbelievers who want to divorce. Paul's command is clear: If you are a believer, and your unbelieving spouse is determined to divorce you, do not stop him. You are not to fight the divorce, for that may lead to further harm rather than good. If your unbelieving partner leaves, search the heart of God concerning your future status. Pray that God in His sovereignty will bring your spouse to faith in Christ and bring about the reconciliation of your marriage. If you feel that you cannot remain unmarried, ask God to bring you a mate who loves Christ and is committed to Him.

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