

*To Tie
The Knot
Or Not*

A Biblical Study of Marriage
And the Single Life

Gil Rugh

To Tie the Knot or Not

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Foreword

The marital status of individuals is often a source of much discussion. That is especially true if divorce and remarriage have occurred or if an individual is getting well on in adult life and is not yet married. Much needless misunderstanding between individuals and unnecessary pressure could be avoided if we more clearly understood the teachings of Scripture about three major areas of practical living—marriage, divorce and the single life.

Jesus addressed these issues head on in His confrontation with the Pharisees in Matthew 19. The Apostle Paul gave added revelations in 1 Corinthians 7 as he answered specific questions which had been addressed to him by first-century believers at Corinth. Even though this teaching from Christ and Paul occurred in the first century of the Christian era, the need for teaching on these subjects is no less today than it was when Christ and Paul first addressed these subjects almost two thousand years ago.

As you consider these areas of great concern, may the Spirit of God guide you into a clear understanding of the Scriptures related to these subjects and enable you to more compassionately relate to those around you who may be struggling internally with these issues.

C H A P T E R O N E

God's Plan for Marriage

In Matthew 18, Jesus was teaching in the region of Galilee in the northern part of Israel. Chapter 19 records His proceeding into the southern area of the country called Judea in the region around Jerusalem. Later He moved back into the region around Jerusalem in preparation for the events leading up to His crucifixion. As Jesus made this journey, great multitudes followed Him and came out to hear Him.

The Question of Divorce

Matthew 19:2 indicates that Jesus carried on a great ministry and healed many in the multitudes which followed Him. He continued to display the greatness of His power which was an evidence of His being the Messiah, the Son of God. But these evidences of power made no impact on the religious leaders who came out to do battle with Him. They were not impressed by the power He displayed through the healings. Instead, they came out looking for opportunities to trap Him in an attempt to discredit Him before the people. To do this they raised the issue of marriage and divorce.

The issue of divorce in Jesus' time was similar to today. As soon as you begin discussing divorce, you feel that you are in a losing battle, because no matter what your position, there will be many people who will disagree with you. That was the purpose of these religious leaders in raising the issue of divorce.

Their purpose in coming to Him is stated in Matthew 19:3: "And

some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him.” They were attempting to discredit Him and raised the issue of divorce to do so. Jesus responded to them, but not in the way they expected. The first twelve verses of Matthew 19 revolve around a discussion related to marriage and divorce.

The discussion is easily divided into three basic parts. The first part is God’s plan for marriage. Then Jesus discusses the provision for divorce which is followed in the third section by the place of celibacy.

God’s plan for marriage is discussed by Jesus in Matthew 19:3–6. The stage is set in verse 3: “And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?’ ” Keep in mind the context and purpose for their question. They asked Jesus in order to test Him. They were not searching for information nor were they seeking help in resolving a difficult question. They were looking for any cause at all simply to put Him on the spot.

There were two major interpretations among the Jews on the subject of divorce. The liberal school taught that you could divorce your wife for any reason at all. Jewish writings of the time indicate, for example, that if she burned the dinner, that was a valid reason to divorce her. If she talked so loudly the neighbors heard her, that was another valid reason for divorce. The liberal Jews had established all kinds of silly options allowing divorce for any insignificant matter. This is similar to today’s “no-fault” divorce. If you do not like your husband or wife anymore, you can divorce him or her and leave.

The more conservative position on divorce allowed only one reason for divorce—sexual infidelity. As you might expect, the liberal position was more popular in Israel. The Pharisees were attempting to put Christ in a dilemma. No matter which position He took, He would alienate those who held the other position. As a result, the Jewish leaders hoped He would lose credibility with at least some of the people in Israel.

Jesus’ Emphasis on Marriage

The Pharisees asked the question, “Is it lawful for the man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?” (Matthew 19:3). But Jesus

turned it around and told them since they did not understand what the Scripture teaches about marriage, their great concern was how to break a marriage. He continued to inform them that if they understood what God said about marriage, that would resolve their question about divorce. He wanted them to understand that marriage is an institution established by God and intended by Him to be permanent. If that is the focus, then how to break the relationship pales into the background.

Matthew 19:4 continues with Jesus' response to the question of the Pharisees: "And He answered and said, 'Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female?' " In answering their question, Jesus takes them all the way back to the beginning in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis. Of course, they had read Genesis 1 and 2. The Pharisees were experts in the Old Testament, but the problem was that they read it without understanding. They had not applied it to their lives in a meaningful way, so they failed to see the impact of Genesis 1 and 2 in their own lives as it related to the issue of divorce.

It seems to me that this is the major problem we face with the issue of divorce today. It is surely the major problem among Evangelical Christians. Many believers have failed to consider what marriage is all about as God instituted it and ordained it. As a result, we spend much more time talking about the issue of divorce and its propriety in certain situations when God's emphasis is on the permanence of the marriage relationship.

The Genesis Record Inspired

After telling them that God created them in the beginning and made them male and female in Matthew 19:4, Jesus continued in verse 5, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh." It is significant that in the answer Jesus gave in verses 4 and 5, He quoted from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 because that places His stamp of approval on the inspiration of both chapter 1 and chapter 2 of the Book of Genesis. This is important to us because many people today say the accounts of creation recorded in these two chapters are totally separate and unrelated accounts. Liberal scholars would have us believe Genesis 1 is the perspective of one writer on creation while Genesis 2 was written by someone else who gave a totally different

account of creation. That is not the way Jesus saw it. Jesus said Genesis 2 helps us understand Genesis 1, and together they help us understand God's perspective on a biblical marriage.

Genesis 1 gives us an overview of God's creating work on each of the six days of creation and His resting on the seventh day. Genesis 1:27, part of which Jesus quoted in Matthew 19:4, tells us, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." The emphasis is on God creating mankind as human beings. He created them in the image of God, both male and female. Here God stresses the equality of the man and the woman. Both are created by God in His image. They are created as personal beings with emotion, intellect and will. They are created to function in a personal relationship with the personal God who made them and in a personal relationship with one another.

God's Purpose in Marriage

Jesus said in Matthew 19:4 that this simple statement from Genesis 1:27 helps us understand God's purposes in marriage. This passage tells us that God created mankind with one man and one woman. Jesus indicated to the Pharisees that this ought to explain to us what God intended in marriage. He did not create one man and three women. He did not create five men and one woman. He created one man and one woman! God's intention in marriage is one man with one woman permanently. "Oh, I did not know Genesis 1:27 told us all of that," you say. Do you see how we get into issues like divorce because we fail to understand what God has said?

Genesis 2 is an in-depth explanation of what transpired in Genesis 1:27. Genesis 1 gives an overview of God's creating work in the six days of creation. Genesis 2 centers in on the epitome of God's creation—mankind—that part of His creation which was to function in a personal relationship with Him, reflecting His own image. Genesis 2 is not a different account of creation. It only elaborates on the account reported in chapter 1.

Genesis 1:27 says God created mankind as male and female. If we did not have the elaboration on the creation in Genesis 2, we might conclude that God created both man and woman in the same way. But Genesis 2 tells us that after God created man out of the

dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life, He then put that man into a deep sleep, took a rib out of his side and built from that rib a woman whom He gave to the man as his wife. Since according to Genesis 2:23 God created the man and took the woman out of him, Genesis 2:24 says, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Jesus says in Matthew 19 the reason we are so concerned about divorce is because we fail to understand God's intention in establishing marriage—that a man and a woman should invest their lives in one another permanently.

We need to consider some of the facts God reveals in Genesis regarding the marriage relationship. A lack of understanding these things has serious consequences in the marriage relationship. We must be reminded of what God intended when He created man and woman and established the marriage relationship.

In the Image of God

The first thing revealed about the man and the woman created in Genesis 1:27 is that they were created in the image of God. This indicates equality of persons. Both man and woman reflect the image of God because they are made in His image. The woman is the reflection of the image of God just as much as the man is. The man and the woman alike are made to have a personal relationship with the personal God who made them.

Dominion Over Creation

Interestingly enough, both were created to rule over God's creation.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen. 1:26).

The account continues in Genesis 1:28:

And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The husband and the wife together were given dominion over all of creation. The woman was not created as a servant, she was created to function as part of a team with her husband to rule the creation. God gave dominion over the whole creation to both man and the woman.

Sexual Relationship Established

Third, they were created to populate the earth according to Genesis 28. The fall of man did not occur until Genesis 3. It was God's intention in creating a man and a woman that they populate the earth. In other words, it was God's intention before the Fall, that Adam and Eve would have a sexual relationship and produce children. What mankind has done to pervert and distort sex is a result of the entrance of sin into the world. But the sexual relationship itself was ordained and established by God in marriage at the beginning of creation.

Companionship

Fourth, we are told in Genesis 2 that the man and the woman were to be companions for one another. "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him' " (Gen. 2:18). This is the first time God says that something is not good. He said repeatedly on the various days of creation that what He had created was good. But now God says it is not good for man to be alone, so He will make a helper suitable for him.

The marriage relationship is God's usual pattern in life. Later we will consider God's special instructions for those who are single. But the usual pattern to be expected is for a man and a woman to marry each other. Even though the man was created to have a personal relationship with God, it was God's intention that his needs for companionship be met by another part of the creation. You will notice that the issue of loneliness was addressed before the issue of sin arose in the world. It was not good for Adam to be without a companion, and that was true even before the Fall. God intended the man to have a companion, so He made a helper suitable for him.

There is something so simple about this that we almost miss it. What did God make for Adam? Couldn't God have made another

man? If all you need is a friend, couldn't another man have been created so the two could have been friends? That man could have been someone to talk to, someone to toil with in the garden, someone to just be there. Wouldn't that have helped? It would not have accomplished God's purposes in meeting the basic needs that He created within the man. Those needs could only be met by one who was made to complement him—not one made just like him. It is important to notice that God said He would make a helper suitable or fitted for him.

The word translated "helper" is not a derogatory or demeaning term. It is used repeatedly in the Old Testament of God Himself who is our helper. When the Bible says God is our helper, that is not demeaning to God. It means that God renders the aid, support and assistance we need. When God indicates He will make a "helper" for man, it means that He is going to make a companion for him, one who will assist, support and aid him. This helper will be fitted or suitable for him. The woman is not created inferior to man, but as God is our helper, the woman is to be the man's helper. One example of an Old Testament use of this word is in Deuteronomy 33:7 "Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people. With his hands he contended for them; and mayest Thou be a help against his adversaries." God becomes involved in meeting our needs and giving us whatever aid, assistance and help is necessary. So God said He would make woman as the companion for man to be a complement to him.

It is crucial to recognize that men and women are different, because God made them to complement one another, not to be the same. God did not make another man for Adam's companion in the garden. When we try to make women like men, we destroy God's purposes for them. We destroy God's purpose for the woman just as we ruin God's purpose for the man if we try to make him a woman. God's purposes are realized when each functions as God created them to complement one another, not to compete with one another. The strategy of the world today is competition. Men and women compete against one another, but God's intention in creation was for them to complement one another. Until we understand the difference that God made between men and women, we cannot appreciate the value of the relationship. Husbands and wives need to realize how important each is to the other. I cannot realize the full

potential for which God created me without the ministry of my wife in my life. That is true for my wife also. God created the woman as a helper and companion, one suitable for him. She was created as a balance to him and as a complement to him.

The Covenant Relationship of Marriage

Genesis 2:24 indicates the man and woman have been joined together in a covenant relationship by God. The question is often raised whether marriages are made in heaven. The answer is yes! When a man and woman are joined in marriage, that is a covenant before God Himself which joins them in a binding, permanent relationship. That is why Jesus will go on in Matthew 19:6 and say, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Separation From Parents

We need to consider a few facts about this covenantal relationship which is established by God between the man and the woman. The first fact is that separation is involved in establishing the marriage relationship. This indicates that the marriage relationship supersedes all other relationships.

The relationship of parents with their children is the second closest relationship on earth. That relationship with children is not a permanent relationship. My children will always be my children, but I am raising them to be independent. There will come a time when they will leave our home. At that time they will give themselves in a commitment of love to the mate God provides for them. The relationship I have with them is for a period of time. They will leave that relationship and be joined in a permanent, binding relationship to their mate. When I was married, I left my parents. I still honor them as my parents, I still respect them and I still have responsibilities to them. However, I have committed myself in a separate and binding relationship which supersedes my relationship to my parents.

You must always keep in mind that your relationship with your spouse is the most important and most responsible commitment you have. That relationship supersedes the relationship you have with you children. Your number one commitment is to your spouse and the responsibilities entailed in that relationship. This means that full

attention is given to meeting the needs of your spouse. This helps clarify things for us. When we have children, our number one responsibility is still to the spouse.

A Permanent Relationship

Second, this covenantal relationship established by God clarifies the permanence to this relationship. "For this cause a man . . . shall cleave to his wife" (Matt. 19:5). The word translated "cleave" is used often in the context of God's covenantal relationship with the nation Israel. Because of that covenant, Israel entered into a relationship based on a covenant or agreement. Israel was to cleave, to cling, to hold fast to God. The marriage relationship is a commitment in love to your spouse which is characterized by permanence.

The Old Testament gives several examples of the use of this word. God spoke to Israel in Deuteronomy 10:20: "You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name." This is a firm unshakable commitment and bond with God. The Jews were to hold on to Him in every circumstance because they belonged to Him.

God continued His instructions to Israel in Deuteronomy 11:22: "Walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him." The word translated "hold fast" is the word which is often translated "cleave." Israel's responsibility in light of the covenant God established between Himself and them was to cleave to Him. This expression is used in a number of other passages as well.

A Relationship of Intimacy

Third, this covenant establishes a relationship of oneness or intimacy: "And the two shall become one flesh" (Matt. 19:5). This one-flesh relationship is expressed in the sexual relationship where the two become one physically, but the oneness encompasses the entire person. Individuals who are married become one in God's sight. He joins the two together as one, a concept which is expressed only within the confines of the marriage relationship. It is an expression of oneness God has established between the husband and wife which binds them together in every area of their person and personality.

In light of these basic facts covered by God in the creation ac-

counts of Genesis 1 and 2, what is all this talk about divorce? To discuss divorce when God has established the permanence of the marriage relationship is like me holding a glass in one hand and saying that now I am going to break the glass without harming it. There is no way to break the glass in two without doing damage to it. When the glass is broken, it will have been damaged.

That is the way God sees the marriage relationship. I am now one with my wife in the relationship God has established. There is no way that relationship can be broken without doing any damage. In the marriage relationship, God brings two people together and joins them in a covenant relationship of oneness.

To try to divorce your spouse without damaging the two of you is like having a discussion for a week about cutting off your arm without affecting your body. Your arm is part of your body. There is no way to cut it off without affecting your body. Just as you cannot break what is one without damaging it, or cut off your arm without harming your body, so you cannot divorce your spouse without ruining what God has done. That is why Jesus said that man ought not to try to divide what God has joined together.

As you consider these concepts, it becomes more clear why Jesus told the Pharisees they did not understand what God wrote about marriage or they would not be discussing divorce the way they were. The same problem continues today. The philosophy of the world that two individuals who have grown apart may as well go their own ways has infected and affected believers. Unfortunately, many people just say good-bye and leave. But Jesus said if you do that, you do not understand at all what God said about marriage. Even believers in Jesus Christ, committed to the Word of God, must come to grips with what God says in His Word about marriage.

Living In the Relationship

How this new relationship of husband and wife is to be lived out is developed in a number of New Testament passages. We are not the same because God created us to be complementary. We are different so there will be different responsibilities and obligations. When I function as God intends for me to function and when my wife functions as God intends her to function, we complement one another and can reach the full potential we each have as God's chil-

dren. As long as we follow the emphasis of the world by trying to establish our own person and our own identity, thinking that we must be significant in and of ourselves, we will be frustrating God's plan and keeping ourselves from realizing our full potential. I cannot realize the full potential God has given me as His child until I commit myself to meeting my wife's needs and developing her spiritually. Neither can I reach my potential until my wife makes that commitment to me.

Responsibilities In the Relationship

God has given responsibilities to both the husband and the wife. The husband is to provide godly leadership for his wife, doing whatever is necessary to meet her needs and enabling her to be all that God intends her to be. The husband is responsible for his wife in every way. It amazes me that if a man gets into a disagreement with his wife and the marriage begins to drift, he wants to complain about what she is like. If the wife is not what she ought to be, that is a reflection on the husband and an indication of failure on his part. As a husband I am to be investing my life in my wife and allowing God to work through me to make her what she ought to be. If your wife has been living with you for twenty years, why isn't she better than she is? "Oh," you say, "you do not know what she is like!" If she is as bad as you say, then after twenty years you have not really contributed anything to her development, have you?

The wife is to be submissive to her husband's leadership and invest her life in him. First Corinthians 11:9 says, "For indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake." The woman is made to be suitable for the man. That goes contrary to the philosophy of the world which emphasizes that the woman is to establish her own identity and be her own person, that she should be able to stand apart from her husband. God says she is to invest her life in her husband adjusting to him and doing whatever is necessary to be a helper suitable for him.

Just as God does not demean Himself by being our helper, so the wife does not demean herself by being the husband's helper. She is to support him and enable him to be all God wants him to be and to see him reach the potential God has created him to have. "Well," you say, "if the wife did that, she would lose her own identity." Isn't that what happens in oneness? When two become one

they lose their separate identities which are then merged together. To the larger extent the wife loses her identity in her husband because the Scriptures say that the husband is over the wife. To a large extent my wife loses her identity in me because she is to invest her life in being a complement to me by being everything I need so I can be the man God wants me to be.

What does the wife accomplish? What a man accomplishes is a testimony to the work of his wife in his life, because God uses her to enable him to be all God wants him to be. Both will be rewarded for their ministry. Heaven will balance it out. The husband may get a lot of the glory here, but that does not mean that God is confused. The reason I can carry on the ministry I have is because my wife is being the wife God intended her to be. This enables me to be the man He intends me to be so the ministry He has intended for me can be accomplished. It cannot be done any other way than God's way. There is no other road to fulfillment and accomplishment apart from God's way.

The world's philosophy goes in the opposite direction, but that does not surprise me. What concerns me is that many believers are assuming the world is right. We must remember that God's Word is always right. In His Word we see God's plan for man and woman to reach their potential.

One does not have to be very smart to know what to do to frustrate God's plan. All you have to do is drive a wedge between the man and the woman, turn them against each other and send them off in their own directions. Give them a burden to establish their own separate identities, and you have succeeded in frustrating God's plan. You may know people who think they are fulfilled by doing their own things. But you do not know anyone who has the fulfillment God can give who is doing it his own way. The true realization of fulfillment will be revealed in eternity, not simply by measuring things by the way the world looks at them today.

Examining Your Relationship

We want to consider a few passages which give us the opportunity to examine our own relationships. Paul wrote of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:3,4: "Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have au-

thority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." God says the husband's body is to be used to meet his wife's needs and the wife's body is to be used to meet her husband's needs.

Paul continued in 1 Corinthians 7:33, "One who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife." The same thing is to be true of the wife who is married: "But one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband" (1 Cor. 7:34).

My focal point as I work through the day is not to be on my own concerns. If I hope as I leave for home that Marilyn has the dinner on the table, that it is a dinner I like, that she understands what a hard day I had, that the house is in order, and that things will be quiet so I can relax, this indicates that I am not thinking about how I can please her. If she is hoping that I come home understanding that the kids were home sick, that she had nothing but confusion all day, the dinner did not turn out and the washer broke down, so I had better come home ready to give her some help, she is not concerned how she might please me. But it would really make a difference if through the day, as I thought of going home, I would think of what would really please Marilyn. As I go home I should be concerned about how I can invest my life in her to be pleasing to her. If she is thinking the same thing about how she can be pleasing to me when I come home, that takes care of the conflict. If the focal point of our lives is in pleasing the other one, that will remove a lot of conflict when I get home.

Ephesians 5 further develops the responsibilities of the husband and wife. Wives are to be subject to their husbands and husbands are to provide godly leadership for their wives. Paul is saying in this passage that a person ought to be able to look at my relationship with my wife and see the way Christ deals with His Church. The same person should be able to look at my wife and see how the church is responsive and submissive to Jesus Christ. As parents we should be able to tell our children that our relationship with Christ is like the relationship we have as husband and wife. Would that help your children understand Jesus Christ and His love all the more? It ought to. Too often we have distorted and shattered the picture.

To have wives submissive to husbands who are providing godly leadership runs contrary to fallen, sinful nature.

Ephesians 5:18 reads, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” This begins a continuous sentence running all the way through verse 22 and indicates being filled with the Spirit manifests itself by a wife being submissive to her husband and by a husband providing godly, Christ-like leadership for his wife. Such a pattern is not natural to fallen human flesh. You cannot do it on your own. If I am not going to be submitting my life to the Spirit and letting God have His way with me, I will not be the husband my wife needs in the fullest possible way. If my wife is not submissive to the Spirit, she will not be the wife who can meet my needs to the fullest possible extent. The control of the Spirit of God in the life is what makes this all work. That is why only true believers can have the kind of marriage that gives all the fullness of satisfaction in the relationship which God created us to have.

This concept is repeated in Colossians 3:18: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” This pattern is consistent in all the passages dealing with the relationship of husbands and wives. Wives are to be submissive to their husbands, and husbands are to provide godly leadership for their wives. It is fitting before God that the wife be subject to her husband. The world goes contrary to that teaching, but the world is not concerned about functioning in a way which is honoring to God. However, believers must have that as their goal. It is fitting for the wife to be submissive to her husband.

Then notice the command of Colossians 3:19: “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.” This is *agape* love, which means I am to be giving myself for my wife. This concept is developed in detail in Ephesians 5:22 and following. Just as Christ gave Himself for the Church, so the husband is to give himself for the wife. Just as Christ did whatever was necessary to make the Church everything it ought to be before God, so I am to give whatever it takes to enable my wife to be everything God wants her to be.

The last statement of Colossians 3:19 says that husbands are not to be embittered against their wives. If you see a man develop-

ing conflicts with his wife, you will often see bitterness setting in. The word translated “bitter” means to be relentless, harsh, spiteful, mean, vindictive. It is amazing to see a husband turn on his wife so that his attitude toward her becomes one of meanness and vindictiveness. Such husbands often become relentless in the pressure they put on their wives to demonstrate their vindictiveness. The warning Paul gives here is that if you do not love your wife in the power of the Spirit, watch out, because bitterness will set in and you will become critical. Then you will look for ways to get back at your wife and tear her down instead of build her up.

First Peter 3 begins with the same instruction we have seen previously regarding the responsibility of wives to be submissive to their husbands, but it answers an important question for the wife who thinks her husband is a turkey. Scripture is clear. Even if your husband is not a winner, your responsibility has not changed. If you are married to an ungodly husband who is disobedient to the Word, one who does not love you like he should, your responsibility does not change. Isn't it nice how God simplifies things? You do not have to determine whether your husband is a Type C, or Type B, or a Type F husband. Your responsibility is to function biblically as a godly wife who is submissive to her husband, looking for ways to meet his needs and to enable him to reach his potential as a man. The goal is that through your godly character and conduct, God might draw him to salvation. Perhaps the woman has the harder job because Peter devotes six verses to describe her responsibilities while he only gives one verse to the husband. That does not mean the husband's responsibility is less important, it just means it is laid out more simply.

Peter addresses the husbands in 1 Peter 3:7: “You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” There is nothing worse than a stupid husband. Some men think they are married to an iron skillet, but God indicates the wife is a weaker vessel. The husband is to understand her and appreciate her weakness and frailty. This is so he can care for her properly and live with her in an understanding way. If you as a husband will live with your wife as you should in a biblical way, treating her properly as a weaker vessel, you will find that she does meet your needs.

The responsibility is for the husband to live with his wife as a weaker vessel since she is a woman. And that statement is not a put-down. It does not mean the wife is inferior. You do not place more value on a cast iron skillet than you do a valuable vase, even though the vase is weaker. We handle fine china with great care. However, skillets are tossed around without much care.

The woman is a weaker vessel created to complement her husband. She is to be sheltered and protected by him and is to receive his love and care. He is not to treat her like one of the guys and wonder why problems arise in the marriage. The husband is to grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life. She is not inferior, but she is a weaker vessel created to complement the husband, to be sheltered and protected by him. The husband should follow through with his responsibilities so his prayers are not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7). How the husband treats his wife affects his spiritual life. If he is not being the husband he ought to be, his relationship with God is not what it ought to be. Sometimes a man is not the kind of husband he ought to be because he does not have the kind of relationship with God he ought to have. If you start having problems with your wife, your prayer life suffers. Pretty soon you do not have any time or interest to be in the Word of God and you are on a downhill slope.

You must back up and thank God for the wife He has given you. She is God's provision for you to be all He wants you to be. You must invest your life in her. She too will be used by God to enable you to walk as a man of God whose prayer life is unaffected by problems and is honoring to Him.

Jesus is saying the issue is not divorce—it is marriage! Before you can talk about divorce, you must understand what marriage is all about. God's intention from creation was that a man and woman be joined together in a permanent bond of oneness established by Him so they might invest their lives in one another in such a way that will enable them to realize the potential God has given them.

CHAPTER TWO

God's Provision for Divorce

In the last chapter we examined the questions the Pharisees raised regarding divorce to try to trap Jesus Christ and discredit Him before the people. Christ proceeded to tell them what God said about marriage, which should have resolved most of their questions about divorce. After telling them that God created one man and one woman for a permanent marriage relationship, Jesus said in Matthew 19:6, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

The Pharisees, very familiar with Scripture, continued trying to trap Christ. Matthew 19:7 continues, "They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate and divorce her?'"

The Pharisees Question Jesus

The first problem in their question is that Moses did not command them to divorce their wives, which Jesus called to their attention in Matthew 19:8: "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.' " Jesus said that from the beginning it was not God's intention that there be divorce. But divorce is a result of the hardness of hearts. It is important for us to see that Jesus says the only reason there is any discussion of divorce is because of the hardness of heart. Divorce takes place in the framework of rebellion against God through a heart that is closed to what God says. But this is not what God intended from the beginning. We

sometimes err by saying that the cause for divorce is due to the couple not getting along. Scripture indicates that is not the problem. It is only a symptom of the problem. The problem is a heart hardened in rebellion against God. One of the symptoms of that rebellion is marriage problems.

This can be illustrated by a person with a serious disease which causes him to have a hacking cough. He may be able to take something to stop the coughing, but if the hacking cough is indicative of a serious disease or illness, to treat the hacking cough is only to treat a symptom. Sometimes when people say they are having a marriage problem, they are actually describing the symptom of a more basic problem—a heart that is hardened toward God and is in rebellion against Him. We are speaking primarily in the framework of believers. As a believer hardens his heart toward God, sin and hardness of heart spreads. In the Scripture, sin is described by the analogy of leaven which permeates. The results seen in the marriage relationship are the natural consequences of not being what God wants the believer to be—living his life in submission to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Such resistance to God will affect those around him.

The closest relationship I have on earth is with my wife. God has placed me in a relationship of oneness with her. When I am hardened toward God and in a state of rebellion against Him, that will have a natural impact upon the one with whom I am bound in a relationship of oneness. My hardened condition reflects itself in my attitude toward God and toward the people closest to me.

My experience has been that a person who is getting a divorce is generally not one in whom the Word of Christ is dwelling richly. Such a person usually does not tell me how excited he is about the Word of God nor share how he is learning and growing. He is not one who says the Word of God is more precious to him than his food or sweeter than honey. He does not express the delight of his life as investing himself in the Word of God. Such a person is generally not evidencing the beauty of the character of Christ in his life. His life also is not usually a testimony before the world of what Christ can do in a person's life. This is because a person who is actively pursuing divorce is usually one in a state of hardness toward God. Such a person is resisting God's will and His purposes.

Even though I may not be aware of the specific circumstances in any given case, yet I know that the Word of God says that divorce comes about because of the hardness of heart. People close their minds to what God has to say and what He wants to do in their lives. To put it in a proper perspective, it is a spiritual problem. Unbelievers in such circumstances have an unresolvable problem unless they are willing to believe in Jesus Christ and allow Him to work His purposes in their lives. Then there is hope because there is a willingness to deal with the heart which is deceitful and desperately wicked above all things, hardened toward God. That attitude can even settle into a believer's life.

Divorce in Deuteronomy

When such hardness of heart indeed existed, Moses granted permission for divorce. The passage the Pharisees were referring to is Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

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, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled.

No Return After Remarriage

The purpose of this passage is not to give instructions regarding divorce, but rather to forbid returning to a former spouse. One who is divorced and married to someone else is never allowed to return to the former spouse. If you have been married, divorced, then remarried, and your present spouse dies and the spouse of your former spouse dies, you and your former spouse could never be remarried again. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 says you cannot return to the former spouse if either of you has been remarried because to do so "is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord God gives you as an inheritance." An allowance is given by Moses that divorce may occur. You will notice

that Moses does not command it, but he does tell them that whenever a divorce occurs and you marry someone else, you can never go back to your former partner.

Even though it is not our purpose to delve into that detail here, what is the purpose of that restriction? For one thing, it helps settle the fact that you cannot decide simply to compare one spouse with another one, then if you find the second one is not better, you will go back to the first one. It seems that something serious happens that is unbreakable even by divorce. When you were joined in that original marriage, you were joined in a family relationship. A family bond is established at marriage, and even when the marriage relationship is broken, there is a family tie that is maintained. So to return to the former spouse would be a form of incest.

Because of Incest

Deuteronomy 24:1–4 seems to relate to passages in which incest is forbidden, such as Leviticus 18. Marriage is forbidden even with those family members where a blood tie is not involved. For example, if my mother were to die and my father were to remarry and then my father were to die, I would not be allowed to marry my step-mother even though we would have no blood relationship. This is because she has become family to me by marriage. By the same token, I am forbidden in Scripture to marry my aunt, even if she is an aunt by marriage and not a relative by blood, because she has become a relative to me through marriage. Such a relationship would be viewed by Scripture as a form of incest. This may well be what is in view in Deuteronomy 24. A family relationship has been established, so now that the marriage relationship has been broken by divorce, there is still a family connection which was established by that original marriage which will never change. Therefore, to go back and remarry the original spouse would be a form of incest. It would be like marrying another relative. This helps to clarify the seriousness of the divorce and the impossibility of returning if another marriage is contracted.

Deuteronomy 24 is making an allowance for the hardness of heart. Where divorce has occurred, this passage outlines the pattern which is to be followed. But Jesus said that these instructions are in the context of hearts that are hardened toward God. Divorce was

not what God intended. It is merely what happens among people who are in rebellion against God.

Divorce in Malachi

God's perspective on divorce has always been the same. Malachi 2:13,14 puts divorce in the framework of people who are spiritually hardened and in rebellion against God.

And this is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet, you say, "For what reason?" Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Genesis 2:24 indicates that the husband is to cleave to his wife. That expression denotes that the wife is bound to her husband in a binding covenant relationship. If a husband divorces his wife, he has dealt treacherously by violating a covenant.

God Hates Divorce

Malachi 2:15 continues, "But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit." Divorce does not take place in the context of one who is allowing the Spirit of God to have His way in the life. God continues His instruction:

Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously" (Mal. 2:15,16).

The garment pictures a covering. The husband is to be a covering providing protection for his wife. Yet if he divorces her, he deals treacherously and violently toward her by doing violence to the covenant of God as he breaks it. Therefore, God says He hates divorce.

Divorce a Result of Rebellion

Jesus is saying in Matthew 19 that God's perspective on marriage has always been the same—that marriage is a permanent, binding relationship. The whole issue of divorce centers on the hardness

of people's hearts and an unwillingness to submit to the Spirit and to the plan God has revealed in His Word.

It should not surprise us that divorce goes on in the world, because the world is in a state of rebellion against God. The sinful heart is always at enmity against Him. As the world changes its standards, it manifests more clearly its sinful conduct. Unfortunately churches have begun to accept what the world has decided is acceptable. Why do half the marriages in our country end in divorce? It is because divorce has become an acceptable alternative today. The pressures that were there previously to keep the marriage together have been lifted. Any time the restraints on any sinful conduct are removed, sinful behavior begins to blossom.

As an example, what happens when the restraints of government are broken down for whatever reason in countries like Northern Ireland or Lebanon? As sinful people have the opportunity to manifest the violence of their hearts toward one another, the environment becomes more unlivable. This is because the restraints on sinful behavior have been broken down. What would happen in our country if we were to remove the restraints of government and the fear of justice? If individuals were allowed to kill anyone they did not like without fear of punishment, or in a fit of rage blow someone's house to pieces with him in it, and have no fear of being arrested, society would soon be unlivable.

The same is true in marriage. The restraints on sinful activity have been removed so that previously unacceptable conduct has become acceptable. The hardness of man's heart toward God results in lawlessness blossoming. This should not be so surprising. If the world says it is okay, then everyone does it. We see a similar pattern in the sexual permissiveness among young people. The restraints on sinful behavior have been removed, so now we find it blossoming. God's Word has not changed, neither has His perspective on divorce. It is just more socially acceptable to be in rebellion against God regarding divorce than it was previously. But it is not acceptable to God, and it is not acceptable for us as His children.

The Matthew 19 Exception Clause

Matthew 19:9 continues the account of Jesus' instructions: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and

marries another commits adultery.” An exception is noted here. The Bible does not say that whoever divorces his wife except for incompatibility and marries another commits adultery. It does not even sanction no-fault divorce. If the two of you agree that the marriage is not working, that still is not an acceptable reason for divorce and remarriage according to this passage. Jesus would classify such activity as adultery.

You may agree or disagree with what the Scripture says, but the problem is not that Scripture is unclear. The problem is more likely that you do not like what Scripture says, so you are looking for a way to discard it. You may feel your situation is another kind of exception, but Matthew 19:9 does not say that whoever divorces his wife except for immorality “and certain other exceptions” commits adultery. You may not like what Scripture says, and I may not like it either, but whether we like it or not is not the issue. The issue is what God said.

You may think it is too narrow and there ought to be other allowances. You may feel that your situation is a hopeless case. After all, there are some ladies who are married to turkeys, and there are some men who have the same problem. Some people reason that since you are only going around once in life, you ought to have a second try. You may have gotten married when you were very young and did not know any better. Or you may not have known that she was going to turn out the way she is. Therefore, you conclude that God does not want to ruin your life by holding you in that relationship. Matthew 19:9 says, “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery.” Even though I may not like it, I must be honest and admit that I understand what it says.

God views divorce and remarriage for any other reason as adultery. He has bound the two individuals together in a relationship of oneness. Man does not have the authority to overrule God. A man may enter into another relationship, but God viewed the first one as binding, therefore such action is adultery. “Wait a minute,” you say, “I have this piece of paper which says I am free.” “Oh let me see it. Wait, this is not signed by God.” “No, but my judge signed it.” “Oh, so your judge is now over God?” “Oh, no!” “Well, what do you mean?” It does not really mean anything. It would be like me writ-

ing on a piece of paper that you can go to heaven by taking two aspirin and going to bed every evening at 9 p.m. Signed, Gil Rugh. What effect do you think such a paper will have when you stand before the Lord on Judgment Day?

That is what is going on with divorce. Men have gotten together and provided pieces of paper with signatures on them, so apparently man has made it all right to commit adultery. Man is simply manifesting his rebellion against God, for God has not changed His mind on the subject at all. when man does his own thing in contradiction to God's Word, he commits adultery.

Many questions are raised about the exception clause, "except for immorality." There are two basic interpretations of this phrase.

Various Interpretations

Some are so concerned about the purity of marriage that they try to eliminate this exception from being allowable today. They interpret the exception clause to be related to the engagement or betrothal period for Jews and therefore not applicable today. Others say the exception clause refers to incestuous relationships for the Jews discussed in Leviticus 18. In either case, such an interpretation would mean the exception clause is not valid for today.

Quite frankly, that would be my preference in interpretation, because it would simplify the decisions we have to make. We could simply say there are no allowances today for divorce. But I have not been able to be convinced of these arguments. It seems that the issue here is marriage and divorce as Moses talked about it in Deuteronomy 24. The betrothal period was not an issue in Deuteronomy 24 and neither was incest an issue there. To try to place these subjects in Matthew 19 seems to be looking for something to enable one to do away with any exceptions today.

Analyzing the Exception

However, the exception clause is still there—"except for immorality" (Matt. 19:9). The word translated "immorality" is *porneia*. We are somewhat familiar with it as the base for our English word "pornography." *Porneia* refers to fornication while *pornos* refers to a fornicator. The word refers to immorality of all kinds. It is significant that the word in the exception clause is this broad word rather

than the word for adultery. I believe Christ used *porneia* because that word includes adultery, but it is also broader than adultery. The word includes homosexuality and bestiality as well as adultery. Every adulterer is a fornicator, but not every fornicator is an adulterer. One who commits homosexuality would be referred to as a fornicator, not an adulterer. Fornication is a broader term than is adultery.

Jesus is saying that sexual infidelity of any kind is grounds for breaking the marriage relationship. As I understand it, Christ has said that those things which were punishable by death in the Old Testament, become occasions for dissolving the marriage relationship.

Divorce in Leviticus

If you were an adulterer in the Old Testament, you did not have to get a divorce. They simply took you out and executed you. If you were involved in homosexuality, you did not have to ask for a divorce. They simply took you out and stoned you. When you were executed, that effectively ended the marriage relationship!

The Levitical Restrictions

Leviticus 18 deals with matters related to morality and immorality. "None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness; I am the Lord" (Lev. 18:6). To uncover ones nakedness is synonymous with being involved sexually. In succeeding verses the Lord continues to reveal through Moses the sexual relationships which would be considered sinful. Included in the prohibitions were relationships with a parent, brother, sister, step-brother or step-sister, step-mother, aunt or uncle. Leviticus 18:14 adds, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother; you shall not approach his wife, she is your aunt." You can see here that there is a family tie to the father's brother's wife even though there is not a blood tie to her. That forbids a sexual relationship as we discussed earlier in analyzing Deuteronomy 24.

Leviticus 18 continues to discuss various prohibitions regarding a sexual relationship. Leviticus 18:20 states, "And you shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her." Homosexuality is prohibited in Leviticus 18:22: "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." In spite

of what the world has done by lifting restraints on homosexuality, God still has not changed His Word about the practice. For the world to say that homosexuality is no longer sin means that hardness of heart and rebellion against God can now be manifested openly because the world says it is alright. Leviticus 18:23 prohibits bestiality: "Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion."

The Levitical Punishments

Leviticus 20 gives the punishments for these sins. "If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:10). Leviticus 20:11,12 prescribe the death penalty for certain cases of incest. Homosexuality was also to result in death. "If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them" (Lev. 20:13). The same punishment was meted out for various other forms of incest according to Leviticus 20:14. Leviticus 15 and 16 indicate the same punishment for various forms of bestiality. The punishment for fornication of all kinds in the Old Testament was death. The sexual sins of adultery, incest, homosexuality and bestiality were all punishable by death which effectively freed the innocent party from the marriage relationship.

Why didn't Jesus simply say such sinners should be executed? One clear reason was that in the Old Testament, Israel was a theocracy. God ruled as the King of Israel. The nation had the power of capital punishment. But by the time we come to the New Testament, Israel no longer had the independent right of capital punishment. The Romans reserved that for themselves. When the Jews wanted to execute Christ, they had to get the authority of the Romans to do so. It is true that sometimes mob violence took over and the Jews killed someone, but as far as the legal authority for execution was concerned, it had to be carried out with the authorization of the Romans.

The same thing is true in the Church today. The Church does not stone people who commit immorality. Christ is giving in Mat-

thew 19 the provision by God that sexual unfaithfulness is an awful violation of the marriage bond and the oneness of that bond. Paul discusses this when he writes to the Corinthians saying that when one joins himself to a whore, he becomes one flesh with that whore. This is viewed as an awful violation, a very serious thing before God. God says through Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." It is indeed serious for a person to take his body which has been joined in a relationship of oneness with Christ and join it in a relationship of oneness with a whore. As we survey these passages, we begin to get God's perspective on sexual sins.

There are a couple of issues we need to clarify regarding divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19:9. First, the passage does not say that the innocent party must divorce the one who commits immorality. The passage does not say that sexual immorality breaks the marriage relationship, but it provides for breaking the marriage relationship. Secondly, it seems that we are dealing in the context of continuing sexual immorality.

Some years ago we had a case of sexual immorality where the wife called saying she had gotten involved in a sexual relationship with her boss at work. Her husband had found out and said he was going to leave her. She acknowledged her activities were sinful and asked for her husband's forgiveness. The responsibility of that husband is clear in light of the Word. Peter asked in Matthew 18 how often he should forgive his brother. Up to seven times? Jesus said he should forgive seventy times seven. Even if the husband or wife is unfaithful, if that person wants forgiveness and is willing to end the unfaithful activity, then it is the responsibility of the innocent party to forgive the person.

The Old Testament gives clear evidence of this responsibility as well. God commanded the prophet Hosea to love a woman who was loved by her lovers. After she lived as a prostitute, God commanded Hosea to forgive her and remarry her. That was a picture of what God had done with Israel. The nation He loved had been spiritually unfaithful to Him again and again, but He forgave her and took her back to Himself. That pattern of forgiveness, even forgiveness of unfaithfulness, which is illustrated by God spiritually and by the prophet Hosea is a clear example to us of our responsibility

to forgive a spouse who is involved in immorality.

However, if the person involved in the immorality is committed to that immoral relationship, and is determined to continue it, then the innocent party has the right for divorce. But divorce is not required. Again, that is a personal decision that an individual must make even though the allowance is provided here in Scripture.

Unbiblical Divorce and Remarriage

What about those who have been divorced for unbiblical reasons and are now remarried, possibly in their second, third, fourth or subsequent marriage? I believe churches have erred in making divorce and remarriage an almost unforgivable sin. We erroneously seem to put people in a category as though that sin could be partially forgiven, but never totally forgiven. We may feel like we are in a dilemma because we do not want to give the idea that it will be acceptable to get divorced and remarried. But we must not go the other way and tell individuals who have been divorced for unbiblical reasons that they are not totally forgiven. It is my understanding that one who has been divorced unbiblically and remarried is forgiven just like any other sinner is forgiven.

Praise God that our past sins do not hang over us as three-fourths forgiven. However, we sometimes approach divorce as though that sin cannot be fully forgiven. One who has been married several times is bound in the relationship in which he now is a part. God picks us up where we are. It is important that we recognize sin as sin, whether it is the sin of immorality or any other sin. We need not try to make excuses for it, but we must recognize it as sin. Then we must go on with God. That does not hinder a person from having just as much fullness of joy in the marriage as he could have had if this were his first marriage, because God does not put limitations on His forgiveness. When He forgives, He forgives everything and promises to work His purposes and plan to the fullest extent through the believer.

That does not mean there are no consequences for sin. Some people look at God's faithfulness to forgive and think they will have the best of both worlds. A man may find another woman who is sort of special and decide to divorce his wife, marry the other woman, then tell God he is sorry. He thinks he will no longer be stuck with

the woman he has now, and he can still have God's blessings in his life. But you cannot put God in a box. There are consequences for sin even when there is forgiveness. When a person willfully sins against God, he puts himself in a position of having to live with fearful consequences. If you decide to rebel against God thinking you are willing to take the consequences, you had better believe there will be consequences. Unforgiveness, however, is not one of the consequences.

David committed adultery, then compounded it by committing murder. Nathan the prophet came and informed David that God had already forgiven him. But Nathan went on to tell him of the consequences that would plague him for the rest of his life. Until the day he went to his grave, David suffered the consequences of the sin. It is important that we not equate the consequences with a lack of forgiveness. David continued as the king of Israel until the day he died. God forgave him totally and never brought up the issue again, but the consequences were there throughout his life.

We must be careful that we do not play games with God in areas of sin. You may think you have God in a box, but He is never in a box.

We are responsible to take up where we are and continue to live in submission to God. This helps me to clarify my life. It helps me in my relationship with my wife. It also helps my wife in her relationship with me. She does not have to wonder whether she ought to stick it out with me any longer. It is good for her to know that she is stuck with me forever. There are no alternatives, so she might just as well work on it and make the best of it! The same is true for me.

What is going on in the world today is having its impact in the church. The world thinks it must have Plan B just in case the first marriage does not work out. Some couples get married with a prenuptial agreement on how to divide the property in case the marriage does not work out. Such thinking affects the mentality of believers as well.

Some believers begin to rationalize by thinking that marriage is a lot rougher than they thought it was going to be. They cannot conceive that God wants them to spend the rest of their lives in a miserable situation. They conclude it would be better for everybody

to acknowledge they made a dreadful mistake, admit the stupidity, make the division, then build new lives. But that is not an alternative. It helps me to have God's clear statements on the matter. I do not even have to think about it.

Imagine riding in an airplane while the engine starts to sputter. There you are thousands of feet up in the air and you suddenly think maybe you had better jump out. But then it dawns on you that they never gave you a parachute when you left the ground. That makes you realize that you had better do all you can to land the airplane safely. If there is no parachute, the option of bailing out is closed.

Did you know that God did not give you a parachute when you were married? "Boy, my husband has really turned into a jerk. What am I going to do?" Well, you have no parachute, so you might just as well learn to work with a jerk. "Well," you say, "I cannot change him." That is true. So you need to ask God to help you to be the person He wants you to be in that situation. Ask Him to use the circumstances to conform you more to the beauty and character of Jesus Christ, because that is what your life is all about.

The world tells us we deserve a little bit of happiness. When we start viewing things from this perspective, selfishness becomes the key issue. The believer's life is to honor and glorify Jesus Christ. God wants to use trials, pressures and difficulties to accomplish His purposes in our lives.

In Matthew 19, Jesus is simply following the pattern that is already laid out in the Old Testament—marriage is a binding relationship. He has shown that except where there is persistent sexual unfaithfulness, that bond cannot be broken.

The exception clause of Matthew 19:9 shows that Jesus accepts sexual immorality as providing for the breaking of the marriage relationship and the establishment of a new marriage. This is also the pattern that God followed in His relationship with Israel. God was spiritually married to Israel, but because Israel committed spiritual immorality by worshiping other gods, God divorced Israel. The spiritual immorality of the nation is laid out clearly in Jeremiah 3:1: "But you are a harlot with many lovers." The ten northern tribes of Israel have been carried away into Assyrian captivity. The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, are the observers. God is speaking about

the unfaithfulness of His people in Jeremiah 3. He continues in Jeremiah 3:2, "Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see; where have you not been violated?" God is indicating that His people Israel have committed harlotry by their worship of other gods on all the hills and high places of the country. He tells them that these actions are spiritual immorality.

The consequences of these actions are reported in Jeremiah 3:8: "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce." God carried the Northern Kingdom away in the Assyrian captivity because of her spiritual unfaithfulness and divorced the nation. We saw earlier in Hosea 3 the pattern God established by taking Israel back and restoring her to Himself. This was an evidence of His great mercy, grace and forgiveness. But the point is established here that God had the right to divorce his wife because of unfaithfulness and put her away. Jesus is simply following that same pattern in Matthew 19 to show that sexual unfaithfulness does allow for the breaking of the marriage relationship. This is not the only New Testament passage dealing with the subject of divorce. The Apostle Paul elaborates on the matter and gives further insights on situations when divorce can occur.

Sex in Marriage

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul dealt with situations that existed in the church in Corinth. This was a church with many problems, one of the problem areas being the marriage relationships. The Corinthian believers had all kinds of distorted ideas about marriage. In the opening verses of this chapter, Paul talked about some of the sexual responsibilities that exist between the husband and wife. In verse 4 he stated that the wife's body belongs to the husband and the husband's body belongs to the wife. The wife is to use her body to fulfill her husband's needs. The husband is to use his body to fulfill his wife's needs. That is scriptural instruction. Evidently some of the Corinthians thought it was more spiritual to abstain from sex even in the marriage relationship, but Paul laid that idea to rest.

Sometimes believers today still get strange ideas about restrictions on sex in the marriage relationship. These ideas are probably influenced by the abuses of sex and the debasing sexual activity that goes on in the world. Christians sometimes get the idea that there is

something dirty or defiling about sex, but God said in Hebrews 13 that the marriage bed is undefiled. God intends for the sexual relationship to be meaningful and fulfilling within the marriage relationship. So Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:5, “Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” Even though our current discussion is about divorce, it is clear in this passage that sex is to be a key part of the marriage relationship. In fact, the sexual relationship is to be such a regular thing that the husband and wife have to agree if they are going to abstain from sex for a period of time to give themselves to prayer. This means that the sexual relationship will be going on quite regularly.

However, note at the end of 1 Corinthians 7:5 what happens if believers do not follow through with this instruction of Scripture: “Come together again lest Satan tempt you.” Many believers have gotten in trouble in their marriage relationships because they have ignored this command. Very simply, they rebelled against God’s instructions on this point. You can be sure that if you throw out a challenge to Satan, he will pick up the challenge. God instructs us clearly how the husband and wife are to fulfill their sexual responsibilities for each other. If one of the partners decides not to follow God’s instructions in this matter, he is simply throwing out a challenge to Satan, a challenge which is sure to bring trouble. If you do not meet your responsibilities in this area with your spouse, Satan will move in. Obviously sex is not the only part of the marriage relationship, but it is to be a major part.

As Paul continued his discussion of marriage and divorce in 1 Corinthians 7, he broke his discussion down into two areas—believers who are married to believers and believers who are married to unbelievers. He gave responsibility to those in both situations.

Believers Married to Believers

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:10, “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord.” Paul is saying that he is addressing a subject which Christ did not address. Christ addressed the subject of divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19 and in Mark 10.

Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:10 was “that the wife should

not leave her husband.” The word which is translated “leave” in this verse means to separate, and it is a word for divorce. It is the same word used in Matthew 19:6, “What God has joined together, let no man separate [*chorizo*],” and refers to divorce. The same word is also found in 1 Corinthians 7:11, “If she does leave [*chorizo*], let her remain unmarried.” The leaving referred to here is obviously a divorce because it results, humanly speaking, in an unmarried condition. It does not terminate the responsibilities which God set down, but it is important to see here that the word translated “leave” refers to divorce. When a person leaves in this situation, he is in an unmarried state. That would obviously mean that a divorce has occurred.

If you interpret “leave” in this verse to mean something short of divorce, it will lead you to a different position on this passage. But the word *chorizo* which is translated “leave” in 1 Corinthians 7:11 and “separate” in Matthew 19:6 means divorce. God’s intention in marriage is a permanent, covenant relationship. That is why Christ said in Matthew 19:6, “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” That is also why 1 Corinthians 7:10 says the wife should not leave her husband and why 1 Corinthians 7:11 indicates that the husband should not send his wife away.

Now let us consider the combined instructions of 1 Corinthians 7:10,11: “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away.” The instructions are very clear. Do not divorce your mate. If divorce has occurred, you are either to remain in the single state or you are to be reconciled to your former partner.

With all the issues revolving around marriage and divorce today, you would think Paul would have more to say about the matter. However, we ought not think we are in a different situation than the city of Corinth. If you read the background of this city in a Bible encyclopedia, you will see that marriage situations in Corinth were not much different from the situations we face today. The Corinthians had a hodgepodge mess just as we have all kinds of confusion today. But the instruction of the Word to believers is simple. You are in a permanent relationship. As a believer, if di-

voice has entered the picture, you can either remain a single person or you can be reconciled to your partner. Those are the alternatives.

Believers Married to Unbelievers

Paul added in 1 Corinthians 7:12, “But to the rest I say, not the Lord.” Paul was not saying that God had not spoken to him on the matter and therefore, he was going to give you his own opinion. No, this is part of Scripture which is totally inspired by God. Paul was saying that Jesus Christ did not address this matter when He talked about divorce, so now Paul wanted to address this new subject. He was going to address the issue of a believer who is married to an unbeliever. Christ had nothing to say about that situation in either Matthew 19 or Mark 10.

Paul continued, “But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away” (1 Cor. 7:12). The example here is of two unbelievers who got married. Then in time, by the grace of God, one of them trusted Christ as Savior. Paul was not addressing the subject of a believer who, in rebellion against God, marries an unbeliever and gets himself into a problem. He was addressing the situation where one of the two unbelieving partners gets saved. The question then comes regarding that believer’s responsibility to Christ and to the unsaved marriage partner. Since the one marriage partner is now a believer in Jesus Christ, his body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. He has committed his life to Christ and wants his life to honor and exalt Jesus Christ. That believer is joined in oneness, sexually and otherwise, to one whose desires may be base and impure. Would it not be better for the believer to divorce the unbeliever?

It may be logical to assume the one who is now a believer should divorce the unbelieving partner. But Paul said no. “If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away” (1 Cor. 7:12). 1 Corinthians 7:13 then addresses the situation of a wife married to an unbelieving husband: “And a woman who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away.” The word translated “send. . . away” (*aphiemi*) in 1 Corinthians 7:12,13 is the Greek word for divorce. The instruction is not to leave, not to separate, not

to divorce. The initiative for divorce in such situations is with the unbeliever.

If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and your spouse has not, the decision regarding the future of your marriage rests with your unbelieving partner. If that unbelieving partner is willing to continue the marriage relationship, then you are to live in that relationship as a godly husband or wife. You are not to be driving that unbeliever to distraction by being the kind of husband or wife that would make your spouse want to divorce you. There may be some unbiblical things you cannot do, but those would be the few exceptions. You are to manifest the character of Christ in your relationship with that unbelieving spouse. You are to be the loving, supportive husband your wife needs. You are to be the submissive, encouraging wife your husband needs.

The Unbeliever Is Sanctified

The reason this behavior is demanded of you is given in 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." It is interesting that this is the reverse of the normal argument of Scripture regarding sanctification. Notice the instructions of Haggai 2:12, "If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?" And the priests answered and said, 'No.' " The point is that if you have something holy and touch something which is unholy, you do not make that which is unholy to become holy.

Haggai makes a point in the next verse about a person: "Then Haggai said, 'If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?' And the priests answered and said 'It will become unclean' " (Hag. 2:13). The principle is clearly established when something holy touches something unholy, that which is holy becomes unholy or unclean.

With this background, you might think that if you are a believer, sanctified and holy before God, and if you maintain a relationship of oneness with an unbeliever who is unclean and unholy before God, you will become defiled. That would be logical from

this passage in Haggai, but Paul makes it clear that this is not true in the marriage relationship. In fact, just the reverse happens in the marriage relationship.

First Corinthians 7:14 states clearly the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband. The word translated “sanctified” is the same basic word in Greek as the word which is translated “holy” and means to be set apart. We are holy because we are set apart by God for Himself. So according to this passage, the unbeliever is sanctified by the believer. Therefore, you do not have to be concerned as a believer about defiling yourself when you enter into a sexual relationship with your unbelieving spouse. In fact, that unbelieving spouse is set apart by God in a special relationship to Him by virtue of the fact the unbeliever is married to a believer. Now be careful, this does not mean the unbeliever is saved any more than the meat Haggai talked about in the Old Testament was saved. That meat was sanctified and holy, set apart to God, but it was not saved.

A person can only be saved by personal faith in Jesus Christ. One cannot be saved by being married to a believer, nor can one be saved by being a child of a believer. But if you are married to a believer, or are a child of a believer, you are in a special relationship to God. Paul wrote to Timothy about the means of sanctification: “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:4,5). The food in this passage is sanctified, but it is not saved. It is set apart in a special relationship.

If you are a child of God, you are the object of His special love and affection. If you are joined in a relationship of oneness with one who is not a child of God, that one who is not a believer, bound with you in the closeness of that physical bond, is in a special relationship before God, because everything that happens to you affects that unbeliever. The tragedies, the hardships and the blessings affect both of you. So you can see that the unbeliever is set apart by God because of your special relationship with God as a believer. He is controlling and directing the believer’s life as His child in accomplishing His purposes for that believer. That means the unbelieving spouse benefits from the relationship with you because you are a believer. He enjoys special blessings he would not have if he were

not married to you as a believer. Therefore, the unbelieving spouse is sanctified or set apart.

Children in Mixed Marriages

Because you are a believer, your children who may not be believers are also in a special place of blessing. This does not mean the children of a believing parent are automatically saved. The children of both believers and unbelievers are born unclean because they are sinners. However, utensils could be holy and set apart to God in the Old Testament. The same was true for food and for people. They were set apart for a special relationship to God. Therefore, the children of a believing parent, even where only one of the parents is a believer, are set apart in a special relationship to Him. Why is that true? Because everything which happens to you affects your child. The child of the believer enjoys a special relationship before God because God is watching out for them, so to speak, in a way that He would not be watching out for the children of unbelievers. So the children of believers have a special blessing. The spouse of a believer also has a special blessing. One of those benefits is the continual testimony of the life of that believer concerning the grace of God.

Don't Fight Unbeliever's Divorce

We have already seen that if a believer is married to an unbeliever, the believer does not have to divorce the unbeliever. But that is not the end of the matter. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:15: "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave." The phrase "let him leave" is given as an imperative in the Greek. It is a command, not a recommendation. When the unbeliever chooses to divorce you, let him divorce. That is God's indication of what His will is for you as a believer. The word translated "leave" means what it has meant throughout the context—to separate, to divorce. This verse could be translated, "Yet if the unbelieving one divorces, let him divorce." Then Paul continues, "The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace." Romans 12:18 says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

You as a believer married to an unbeliever should do all you can to live in a relationship of peace with that unbeliever. You should mani-

fest the beauty of the character of Christ in that relationship. If the unbeliever says he is not willing to live with you any longer because you are a religious fanatic and no fun to be with, there is little you can do to maintain the relationship. The unbeliever thought it was great when you went to the bars together, but he concludes that this religious stuff is not for him, therefore, he is divorcing you. Your response should be to let him know that you have attempted to love him by being the wife you ought to be, but if he chooses to divorce you, so be it. Do not fight it by telling him you are a believer and do not believe in divorce. Paul says God has called us to peace. If the unbeliever says he is going to divorce you, let him divorce. The responsibility for the initiative is with the unbeliever, so if you are married to an unbeliever, the future of your marriage is in the hands of that unbelieving spouse. If he or she should decide to divorce you, God's indication is for you to let that unbeliever divorce you. The instructions in this situation are different than if two believers are married.

Not Under Bondage

Look again at the phrase, "The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases" (1 Cor. 7:15). Some say this means they are not under bondage to try to hold the marriage together, but they are not free to remarry. As far as I can tell, always in the context of divorce, the issue is remarriage. "Not under bondage" is a strong word meaning not enslaved. This means you are free from the obligation of that relationship and are, therefore, free to remarry just as the person in Matthew 19 was free to remarry in the case of immorality.

A similar expression is used in 1 Corinthians 7:39: "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." A couple is bound in a marriage relationship, but when one of the mates dies, the other is free from that bondage. The word translated "bound" in 1 Corinthians 7:39 is not the same as the word translated "bondage" in verse 15. The word in verse 39 is not as strong as the word in 1 Corinthians 7:15 which means to be enslaved, but the picture is the same in the context. When the person is free from the bondage of the marriage relationship because of the death of the spouse, he is free to be married to someone else. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:15 when the brother or sister is divorced by an unbelieving spouse, the

believer is no longer enslaved. That must mean the believer is free to marry a believer. It may be that in the grace of God the unbeliever who divorces the believer will become a believer six months or a year later. If that new believer comes back to the former spouse indicating faith in Christ and wanting remarriage, then I believe it is the responsibility of the original believer to follow through with the request for remarriage providing neither spouse has remarried.

However, the unbeliever who divorces the believer takes a risk of never being able to remarry that believer again. If a year after divorcing the believer the unbeliever has not remarried but decides he would like to be remarried to the believer who was his former spouse, the believer cannot remarry that unbeliever. This is because believers are forbidden to marry unbelievers. The believer may witness to the unbeliever and explain the situation, but the believer is not free to marry the unbeliever. That would be true because before the Lord the divorce by that unbeliever has broken the marriage relationship, just as divorce with immorality effectively broke a marriage where immorality was involved.

If you are married to an unbeliever, you have probably wondered if your life might be much more effective for the Lord if you had someone with whom you could share the basics. Your life as a believer is centered in Jesus Christ, yet you are married to an unbeliever who has no interest at all in spiritual things. Unbelievers have no concern about the Word, about matters of eternal significance, about the spiritual life and destiny of their children, and surely have no concern to model a godly marriage. So wouldn't it be better to divorce the unbeliever and marry a believer? No! Remember, the unbeliever is the one who has the right to make the decision about whether to stay in the relationship or not.

The Possibility of Salvation

Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 7:16 why a believer should stay with an unbeliever even in light of the above questions: "For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?" If the unbeliever is willing to stay with you, that may be an indication to you that God wants to use the impact of your life to bring the unbeliever to salvation in Christ. Is the eternal destiny of that person

worth the inconvenience of your being married to an unbeliever? This does not mean it will be easy, because the unbeliever will not be under the control of the Spirit. He will not necessarily be doing all the things you would like a godly, biblical spouse to do. But your life is to be a testimony to your spouse, so the qualities of Christ in your life will be evident and will hopefully draw your spouse to be more open and receptive to the Word.

The question may also be raised about an unbelieving mate who brings great pressure to bear on the believing spouse. Being married to an unbeliever can be a difficult circumstance to endure. Such a situation can bring tremendous burdens and pressures to the believer. You may feel that no one understands because others seem to be privileged to have believing spouses. They do not understand the pressures and burdens you may be experiencing married to an unbelieving spouse. We must come back to what the Word of God says. God chooses to do different things in each of our lives to accomplish His purposes.

Responding Properly to Pressure

Peter writes about pressure on a believer in 1 Peter 2 as he addresses the issue of submission for believers. Since the biblical pattern is for wives to be in submission to their husbands, the believing wife of an unbelieving husband is usually the one to experience greater pressure. As Peter instructs believers he writes of the believer's submission to governors, rulers and kings in 1 Pet. 2:13-17. Then he addresses the responsibility of servants to be submissive. "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God" (1 Pet. 2:18-20).

What Peter has to say about submission to governments and to employers has direct application to the marriage relationship as we will see in the next chapter. You may have done everything you possibly can as a believer to manifest the beauty of your love to an unbelieving spouse who does nothing but mistreat you. What are

you to do? The answer of the Word is simple. You are to continue to manifest the character of Christ. If you are married to an unbelieving husband who treats you like a queen, good behavior on your part is not something for which you necessarily deserve great commendation. Any wife can blossom in that kind of situation. But what if your unbelieving spouse puts continual pressure on you? 1 Peter 2:21 adds instruction in this regard: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Since Christ was treated unfairly and did not respond improperly, His behavior is the pattern we are to follow. Therefore, if you are in a marriage relationship and are being treated unjustly and unfairly, your response should not be a response of sin. That means you cannot unbiblically divorce your husband. No, I am not aware of all the extenuating circumstances in your situation, but God says that even under great pressure you are not to violate the commands of God's Word. To do so would be sin.

Peter continues to discuss in 1 Peter 3:1 the concept of submissiveness in the marriage relationship: "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husband 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." We are to follow the same pattern Christ set down. The pattern for the wife is to be submissive to her husband. The godly conduct of the wife may be the instrument God uses to bring her husband to salvation.

The responsibility of husbands is given in 1 Peter 3:7: "You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." If a husband is married to an unbelieving wife, he is to be a godly husband so that by the beauty of his character God may work to bring the wife to Himself.

That may not be God's plan. It is possible that when you have done all that you should as a believer, your unbelieving spouse may still determine to get a divorce. The command of Scripture for you is clear: "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave" (1 Cor. 7:15). That still does not frustrate God's plan for you. It is important for us to see that in such an emotional area as marriage, when pressure is

brought by an unbeliever, it is still not the option of the believer to take an unbiblical approach. The example of Christ is clear in 1 Peter 2:22, “Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth.” This was true of Christ even when He was under extreme pressure. God will give you the grace and strength necessary not to sin in your trials if you will draw upon Him for that strength. This does not mean He will necessarily make it easier for you, but it means He will give you the grace to bear up under that pressured situation.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul has given us further teaching on the matter of divorce. God’s plan for marriage is that it should be a permanent, covenant relationship. Only in two exceptions can the marriage be broken by divorce and remarriage—in the case of persistent immorality and where an unbeliever is unwilling to continue to live with a believer. In these two situations, divorce and remarriage are allowable because divorce allows for remarriage.

Do not overlook the fact that the forgiveness of God encompasses everything. If you are in your second, third or sixth marriage, you must recognize God’s willingness to forgive totally. In your previous marriage you may have responded unbiblically in rebellion against God and divorced your spouse simply because it was not working out, or because you thought you found someone better. Praise God, He forgives us and picks us up where we are.

It is also crucial for the Church to recognize that as well. God’s forgiveness is absolute. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has forgiven your past. You are just as clean before God if you are in your sixth marriage as I am in my first marriage because God has forgiven all of your sins just as He has forgiven all of mine. For both of us, all of our sins have been dumped into the depths of the sea and have been put as far away from us as the east is from the west. It is tremendously exciting that we are both clean.

We need to remember God’s grace in our relationships with one another. God’s forgiveness is sufficient for every situation. Now He wants you to build your marriage into a fulfilling and satisfying relationship which reveals the beauty of Christ’s relationship with His Church.

CHAPTER THREE

God's Perspective on Celibacy

Jewish leaders had asked Jesus a question about divorce and remarriage hoping to trap Him. He answered their question in Matthew 19:9: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery." After hearing His answer, The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry' " (Matt. 19:10).

You should note it is Jesus' disciples who are responding with this comment. It is not the religious leaders of the day, nor the Jewish people of the land. Instead, it is Jesus' own disciples. They were saying, in effect, that if marriage is that binding, it would be better to remain single. In that comment we can see how much the attitude of the day had affected even the disciples. When Christ told them married persons are permanently bound except in the case of sexual unfaithfulness, the disciples decided it would be better not to get married. After all, if you are locked into that kind of relationship permanently, that is a long time!

It is not uncommon for young people to get married in their early twenties. That is quite young to be making such a permanent decision! I decided at age 20 that I was going to marry Marilyn. We may live to be 90 years old. I doubt it, but we might. If we do, that means we will have been married for 70 years. That is a long time to be stuck with one dirty, depraved, fallen, sinful human being! No wonder the disciples said there are advantages to being single.

It is interesting that after that comment, Christ did not tell them they were wrong in their conclusion. In fact, He said, "You are right! But the problem is that not everyone can handle it." Matthew 19:11 says, "But He said to them, 'Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.' "

Some people severely distort this passage of Scripture. They take what Christ said in Matthew 19:11 and apply it to what He said about marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:9. They conclude that Christ gave the ideal, saying you should not divorce your spouse, but not everyone can accept that statement. However, if you have studied Scripture at all, you know that is not the way God gives His instructions. He does not tell men what to do, then tell them it is fine if not everybody wants to accept His instructions. His statement in Matthew 19:11, "Not all men can accept this statement," applies to the disciples' statement in Matthew 19:10: "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." Some people have the special ability and gift from God not to marry. He does not argue that it is better not to marry. He is saying that only those who have been specially gifted by God can accept that statement.

In Matthew 19:12 Jesus gave an explanation:

For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this let him accept it.

Christ referred earlier to the statements of Genesis 1 and 2 where God said it is not good for a man to be alone, therefore, He made a helper suitable for him. Jesus now agrees, in effect, with the disciples, saying it is better not to marry, but that statement is applicable only to those who are gifted by God in that way. He is saying if you can lead a single life, then do it. That is not putting down marriage. It is elevating the importance and the privilege of the single life, the meaning of the statement referring to being an eunuch.

The ability to remain unmarried is tied to one's sexual needs. Sex is not the only reason for marriage, but it is a basic reason as is developed here by Christ and in 1 Corinthians 7 by Paul. All other needs can be met to one degree or another outside of marriage, such as friendship, companionship and other social needs. They cannot

be met to the depth they can in marriage, but they can be met to some degree. But the sexual relationship can have no fulfillment outside the marriage relationship.

As Christ talks about eunuchs, He gives three reasons why individuals may be in that condition. Some were born that way from their mother's womb, perhaps with a physical infirmity which has made them sexually impotent. Some were made eunuchs by men, a familiar practice in Old Testament times. Others may have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. They are those who choose to abstain from sexual relationships and from marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The priority of their lives is devoting all their energies and attention to the things of God. The latter reason is the purpose of the single life as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 7.

It is important that we look at the matter of being single from God's perspective. Today singleness is viewed as something abnormal. However, the only thing abnormal about it is that the majority of people are married. Only a select few remain unmarried, but we look at singles as though there must be something wrong with them. We assume they must be maladjusted. Then we want to push them off into their own group and encourage them to resolve their own problems. We have developed a wrong idea that being single is inferior. It is abnormal only from the standpoint that few will be functioning as singles in comparison to those who will be married. But if anything, God looks at singleness as an exalted position.

Paul's View of Celibacy

In addition to Jesus' teaching on the subject of singleness in Matthew 19, Paul addresses the subject in 1 Corinthians 7:1. "Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman." The phrase "to touch a woman" is a euphemism for sexual intercourse which is used a number of times in the Old Testament. After saying in 1 Corinthians 7:1 that it is good for a man not to touch a woman, Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 7:2, "But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." The basic issue which Paul brings to our attention is sexual purity and the need for sexual fulfillment. If you need sexual fulfillment, you need to be married, oth-

erwise, you may fall into immorality. This does not mean that sex is the only reason for marriage, but it is a basic reason. Has God gifted you to lead a single life? One key indication in answering that question is how strong your sexual desires are.

Then in 1 Corinthians 7:3–5, Paul talks about meeting one another’s sexual needs within marriage. He adds, “But this I say by way of concession, not of command. Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that” (1 Cor. 7:6,7). Paul started out saying it is good not to have a sexual relationship with a woman—it is good not to be married. However, some have the need to be married, a fact which Paul acknowledges. His statement in 1 Corinthians 7:6, “But this I say by concession, not of command,” acknowledges the need for the marriage relationship, but indicates Paul is not commanding that everyone get married. His preference would be for everyone to be like him—single.

Do you see how out of step Paul’s desire is with the thinking of his day and our day? Most people today think that everyone ought to be married. When young people get into their mid or upper twenties, some people become consumed with trying to find mates for them. Such individuals would have a hard time with the Apostle Paul. He approached the subject by concluding that it was all right that some are married, but it is too bad they cannot be like him—single. Paul said singleness was better. He did not say it is abnormal; he says it is preferable.

We must be careful to see the balance in Scripture. If you study only what Scripture says about the advantages and importance of marriage, you can come to the conclusion that anyone who is not married must have something wrong with them and they have second best. On the other hand, if you study only what Paul says about the advantages of being single, you will end up with an attitude that it is too bad for all those poor married people. You must study both sides of the issue in order to appreciate that God’s purposes are different for different people.

Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 7:7 that he wished all men were as he—single. Then he continued, “However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.” This is the key. The ability to remain single is a special gift from God. He en-

ables some people in one way, others in another way, "one in this manner and another in that." It is God's intention for some to be married and for others not to be married. The word translated "gift" is the same word Paul uses for the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12-14. God's special enabling by His grace differs from one person to another. We need to understand that and function in light of it.

Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 7:8, "But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I." Paul was single. He said that if you are a widow, a widower or a single person never married, it is good for you to remain that way. Notice that he does not say you must remain that way; he says it is good if you do. "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7:9). Here again we are brought back to the issue of sex. "To burn" refers to burning with sexual passion. Paul is saying that if you have a strong need for sexual fulfillment, you ought to be married. God does not put a premium on someone with a need for sexual fulfillment, determining just to tough it out, without getting married. If you think you are above needing to fulfill your sexual desires, Paul says you are running against God's plan for you. The fact that you have those intense desires is an indication that it is God's intention for you to be married because those desires can only be met in the marriage relationship.

Principles Affecting Marriage

Paul gives instructions to married people in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, a passage we have already considered in our discussion of divorce. Then in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, he sets down some principles affecting marriage, the single life and other areas which he inserts between his discussion of marriage and his discussion of being single. The principle Paul is operating on is stated three times in this section. "Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches" (1 Cor. 7:17). "Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20). "Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called" (1 Cor. 7:24).

The Corinthians had gotten confused. Immorality was rampant in the city of Corinth. It was a part of the false worship system of the

city. Temple priestesses who practiced religious prostitution were a major part of the pagan worship of the Corinthians. Some of those who were saved out of that system associated sex with something dirty and defiling, just as some believers do today because of the way the world abuses sex. They consider sex to be base and defiling. Those believers who took that approach in Corinth came to the conclusion that it would be better not to be involved sexually because they considered sex dirty. Such an approach would obviously affect their marriages. They might conclude that even though they were married, it would be better for them not to have a sexual relationship in marriage, but to practice instead an ascetic lifestyle. You can understand why such an approach would have particular appeal to some people. They might mistake it as being a more spiritual approach. However, Paul said that is not the case at all. He indicated that as God has assigned each person a role in life, that is how he should live. The call of God refers to your salvation. At the time of your salvation, God assigned to you certain abilities, so that is how you should live in light of these abilities.

Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:20, "Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called," emphasizes the point as it relates to marital status. You do not have to change your status just because you have become a believer. If you are married and become a believer, it does not mean that it would be better for you now to be single. Becoming a Christian does not affect your marital status one way or the other. If you are single, you may conclude that you could be much more effective serving the Lord with a godly husband or wife to help you. However, your becoming a Christian does not affect that directly.

The principle is applied by Paul to other things, such as slavery in 1 Corinthians 7:21. This seems to be one of the most important sections in the New Testament on Christianity and social issues. Paul is saying, in effect, that becoming a believer does not necessarily change anything about you socially, not even slavery. If you want to talk about the social impact of the Gospel, you need to keep this section in mind. Some groups have a strong emphasis today on the responsibility of Christians to be changing the social conditions in light of the Word of God. But Paul says the Gospel has nothing to do with social issues. The Gospel changes the person on the inside. Some believers in Paul's day thought that since they had become

believers, they could no longer be slaves to men; they should be slaves only to God. Paul said now that you are a believer, you should be a better slave to men than you were before because you have been set free spiritually in Christ. Paul's concern in this section is the principle that Christianity does not necessarily change the social condition although there may be results. As people get saved, they change the way they live personally, and that naturally has social impact. But society in and of itself does not necessarily change unless there is a major turning to Christ by a number of people in that society.

The principle Paul is dealing with is that since God has saved you, you ought to continue living your life in the social state in which He saved you. Your salvation has nothing to do with your marital status. Now that you have trusted Christ, you ought to live your life to please Him. If you are married, live to please Him as a married person. If you are single, live to please Him as a single person. If you are a slave, live to please Him as a slave. If you are a free person, live to please Him as a free person. Many people unfortunately want to take certain issues and draw implications from them which do not follow through. Paul is emphasizing that your social or marital status is not changed in the least by your becoming a believer in Jesus Christ.

Principle for Deciding

Paul makes a statement in 1 Corinthians 7:25 regarding his opinion: "Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy." This is similar to a statement in 1 Corinthians 7:40: "But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God." Some people conclude they do not have to listen to what Paul says because they think he is only telling us what he thinks, not what God says. Instead, Paul is saying God has not spoken directly to this subject before. Christ did not address it in His statements about the single life in Matthew 19. However, Paul is saying he wants to tell us what he thinks about it and he believes he has the Spirit of God in the matter. We know that what he said was the Spirit of God speaking through Paul because it is part of inspired Scripture. Now we want to consider what God says through Paul about being single.

The Present Distress

The first principle Paul addresses is included in 1 Corinthians 7:26–28:

I think then that this is good in view 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 released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

This principle is related to the present distress. It could be related to particular problems and pressures the believers were under at Corinth, or it could carry the idea of an impending distress. Paul could see that the persecution was going to come, and those with families would have special pressures. Therefore, it would be better if they abstained from marriage. Those who are married must remain married. But he says at the end of 1 Corinthians 7:28, “Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.”

The principle related to the present distress is that if you get married, you will have trouble. That sounds a little negative, but if you think about it, you will realize it is true. If mass persecution were to break out now and all believers were going to be martyred for their faith, those who are married and have a family would have the added pressure a family would involve. The first thing that comes to your mind when you think about persecution is your family. The needs of your spouse and children become a greater concern than yourself. Those living in time of persecutions and trials with families have added burdens which those who are single do not have to be concerned about.

It is more probable Paul is talking not just about persecution that was characteristic at Corinth, but of the general situations of the day. Those things are characteristic of believers in any period of time. Jesus said in John 16:33, “In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” Believers have victory in Christ, but in the world we will be under pressure. Paul wrote to Timothy, “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). If I live a godly life as a testimony for Christ, that will bring pressure and persecution. If I have a fam-

ily, that adds to the pressure because I have to worry about my wife and children and the pressures my testimony for Christ will bring on them. So those who are married will have added pressures and suffering in times of testing. Paul is referring to added tribulation. That must be part of our consideration when deciding about marriage. Living as believers in a hostile environment will cause persecution to be brought to our families.

The Shortness of Time

Paul goes on to another principle in 1 Corinthians 7:29–31:

But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on both those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

The point Paul is making regarding the shortness of time is emphasized in two statements, “The time has been shortened” (1 Cor. 7:29) and, “the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31). The things that characterize this life are in the process of passing and that includes marriage. Such a concept puts all possessions in proper perspective.

Some people give their lives to amassing possessions. The futility of possessions was impressed on us in a recent trip to the Middle East. When you travel to other parts of the world, particularly to areas related to Bible incidents, you see many ruins. Such ruins always amaze me. We visited ruins of the Roman civilization and saw where the Roman senate met in the central part of the empire, the strongest empire that ruled the world. The only things left standing now are some stones and a few columns. Everything is in ruins. If you visit the palaces kings built as tributes to themselves, all you see are a couple of columns, a few blocks of stone and some pieces of mosaic. No matter how much emphasis you put on trying to make yourself known and lasting, the passing of time has its effect. In Egypt we visited the tomb of King Tutankhamen. Room after room of treasures were buried with him, and he was only 18 when he died! The sarcophagus in which he was buried was made of 200

pounds of solid gold. It laid in that tomb for thousands of years and no one ever heard of Tutankhamen until they opened up his tomb. He is a relative nobody.

While in Egypt we went to see some of the pyramids. You can climb up inside one we saw. There is nothing there but a big, empty room. It took this Pharaoh twenty years to build this huge pyramid as a monument to himself. Grave robbers came in and stole his body so nobody even knows where it is today. The pyramid is just a big pile of stones.

This is a good reminder of the transitoriness of the things of life. Paul says that life is like that—it is short. The form of this world is passing away. What foolishness for people to devote their lives to amassing possessions. Paul's emphasis in this passage is that we do not have enough time to devote ourselves to things of this life. A time is coming when it will not matter whether you are married or not. Marriage is a characteristic of this life. Jesus said, "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25). In a hundred years it will not matter whether you were married or not. In the millions of years of eternity, the same will be true, so do not get too occupied with whether you are married or not. If marriage is needful for you, it is important and has its place. But if you are single, you do not have to be concerned about being married or about missing out on everything. Paul says life is short. Marriage is not one of the things that will matter in light of eternity. It is hard for us who are married to grasp that. So much of our lives revolve around our wife, husband or family. I can hardly picture heaven without them. I am a married person and they are important to me, but I know the Word of God says there will not be marriage in heaven, so the marriage relationship is characteristic of the transitory life here.

Life With One Focus

Paul's life was characterized by a single focus. He saw everything in light of his relationship with Christ and His coming again. He measured everything in light of how he could be most effective for Jesus Christ. He devoted the greatest amount of his energy and time to being effective for Christ. Paul knew time is short and that marriage takes time. It draws our attention away from our service for Christ.

Paul elaborates further on this in the remaining verses of 1 Corinthians 7:

But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband (1 Cor. 7:32–34).

This gives us some insight into the marriage relationship. As a married man, I am to be preoccupied with meeting my wife's needs. That is a biblical responsibility. I cannot give the full amount of my attention to serving the Lord. I cannot look for unlimited opportunities to teach the Word and be involved in evangelism because I have to fulfill the responsibilities as a husband to my wife. I am not free as Paul was to look over the world for cities where people need to hear the Gospel. I am not free to take off on a missionary tour that will take me six months, a year or two years. I have a wife and a family for whom I am responsible. Neither can I stay in town and teach Bible studies six nights a week. I need to spend time with my wife and children, meeting their needs. My family begins to distract me—not in a wrong sense, but in a very real sense—from my service to the Lord.

The one who is unmarried does not have nearly so much responsibility. He has to be sure that he has enough to eat and clothes to wear. If he wants to stay out until 2 a.m. teaching people the Word, fine. When he gets home he can go to bed. If he decides to do the same thing the next night, fine. If the Lord opens the door the next night, he can take advantage of that opportunity also. He has no wife and children for whom he is responsible.

Not so with the person who is married. The married individual cannot give undistracted devotion to the Lord. He cannot occupy himself only in serving the Lord. He has to be occupied with what he can do in serving the Lord while also meeting the needs of his family. Paul says it is an advantage to be unmarried in that context.

Paul's concern is clear in 1 Corinthians 7:35: "And this I say for

your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord." A husband or a wife is a distraction in one sense. If you were to study all of Paul's writings about the advantages of the single life in 1 Corinthians 7, you may come up with the idea that it is too bad for those people who had to get married! They are surely distracted people! But Scripture gives a balanced perspective to the subject.

Instructions for Parents

Paul gives some instructions to parents beginning in 1 Corinthians 7:36. You may be aware that during biblical times the father arranged the marriage. There are advantages to that. In our society where young people make their own decisions about marriage, they are usually making that important decision when they are too young to know better. I started dating my wife, Marilyn, when I was 16. I was too young to make that kind of decision, so obviously I cannot be held responsible for that decision. Praise the Lord, He worked it out for good. There were advantages in biblical times to having the parents involved in the decision regarding marriage. Even though parents do not arrange marriages today, the principle is established that young people ought to be very careful in following the advice of godly parents as they look for a marriage partner.

One Who Needs Marriage

The first issue Paul discusses regarding parents relates to a father who has an eligible daughter.

But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she should be of full age, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry (1 Cor. 7:36).

The reference is to the father whose daughter has a need to be married, so he takes into account her needs as he considers her plans. It is not a sin to get married. Some people try to put others on a real guilt trip about marriage. They tell them if they really loved the Lord and had their priorities right, if they wanted to give their full attention and energies to serving Jesus Christ, they would skip marriage. There is an element of truth in that as we have already seen. But

God has not gifted everybody in the same way. Some people can choose to be married while others can remain single. Paul is saying if the daughter needs to be married, let her proceed.

One Who Does Not Need Marriage

Paul gives the other side of the argument in 1 Corinthians 7:37,38: "But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better." Paul does not say it is wrong to get married. He said it is good to get married; but he said it is better not to get married if you are gifted by God to lead a single life. The conditional factor here is the gift. It seems that we view things in the opposite way today. I have a brother who is a 38-year-old bachelor. There has always been the pressure for us to try to get him married. There is not as much pressure now as earlier because by now we have accepted the fact that he is probably going to be a bachelor. But when he was younger, we kept asking him why he was not looking for a good Christian girl to date. We tried to tell him all the advantages of having a wife. But we must keep in mind that God has specially gifted some people for the single life, so we ought to appreciate that.

Our approach often is to take the singles aside, isolate them in their own group and feel sorry for them because they cannot find a husband or wife. Then we do the best we can to search for a mate for them. We try to get them into a singles group so they can help one another with the problems we all think singles have. We sometimes think if a person is single, he is not well adjusted. We think if he were well adjusted, he would get married. Some people think if they see a person 35 and single, he must have some kind of personality problem.

Paul would have had a hard time with our approach. He says it is too bad that everyone cannot be single! He indicates that those who are married have problems the single person does not have. We need to consider the question from God's perspective and appreciate that there are some people to whom God has given a special ability. They will have time and energy to devote to the service

of the Lord which those married do not have. Of course, I do not have a problem with singles getting together for mutual encouragement, but I also believe they should be encouraged to be involved in various ways with those who are married. Singles are those who will be leading the way in many areas. They will have the time to do more Bible study and evangelism than those who are married. They will have the opportunity to be ministering to more people than the married. Therefore, we must not isolate them in their own group. Paul led the way. When others were taking care of wives and children, he was out serving the Lord.

God's Best for the Individual

As parents we need to encourage our children to look at the options of marriage or the single life. Too often we raise our young people to think that if they do not get married, something is wrong with them. When they get to a marriageable age and are not dating or making steps to prepare themselves for marriage, we tend to imply that something is wrong. No wonder single persons begin to think of themselves as out of step and being in the wrong position. We need to be praying for our children, careful to pray for God's best for them. When praying for a godly wife or husband for our children we must remember to pray that if it is God's will for them to lead the single life, that He will help us encourage them to be most effective as a single person. We parents need to have a biblical perspective on this subject. As a body of believers we also need to have a proper appreciation for those who are single rather than feeling sorry for them. We need to appreciate what God is doing in the single person's life and the opportunity he has for service to the Lord.

Celibacy in and of itself does not make you effective for the Lord, anymore than any of the other gifts do. You may have the special ability to show mercy, but that does not mean you will automatically exalt and honor Jesus Christ. You can only honor and exalt Him when you exercise the gift God has given you. There are many Christians who are single, but not using the added time they have to commit themselves more fully to serving Jesus Christ. Unfortunately many are frittering away their time.

Being single is an asset. It is a blessing from God. But your

singleness only exalts and honors the Lord when you use it for His glory. Paul puts singleness in the context of giving you added time and energy for serving Jesus Christ. Singles who are functioning biblically will probably be accomplishing more than those of us who are married because they do not have the added duties of a family.

Instructions for Marriage

Paul deals with the binding principle of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:39: "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." When you are married, you are bound in that relationship, but death frees you from the obligations of the marriage. If your husband or wife dies, you are free to get remarried. But note the principle involved, "Only in the Lord." That requirement is true whether you have been married before and are now a widow or widower, or whether you are a single person who has never married. You can only get married to a believer.

Marry Only a Believer

"Marry only a believer" is a simple statement, but there are other implications to it. That means you can only prepare for marriage with a believer. This says something about who our children can date. We are responsible for them as long as they are in our home. That means they are not allowed to date unbelievers. Dating is a preparatory process. That does not mean you are going to marry every person you date, but dating is the first step toward marriage. If you get married, it will start out with a date, then a second and a third. The more you see of each other, the greater the emotional attachment becomes which draws you together. It is in those circumstances that we lose our ability to be discerning. The problem in such relationships with an unbeliever is that you start off on an unbiblical track. Second Corinthians 6:14 says we can only be yoked together with believers. Paul is addressing a subject in that context which is broader than marriage, but marriage is the most binding of all human relationships. Therefore, a believer cannot be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever, in marriage above all things. That means a believer cannot even be dating an unbeliever, because the end result of dating over time may be marriage. When emotional attachment occurs, then it is easy to find excuses. The excuse

started when the believer began dating the unbeliever. The believer may have rationalized that he would be a good testimony to the unbelieving dating partner. The believer often hopes to be able to lead the unbeliever to salvation in Christ.

The pastor during my teenage years in Philadelphia, Leyman Strauss, had been led to the Lord by his wife before their marriage. Their relationship started out when he asked her for a date. She told him he was not a believer, so she could not date him. He told her that he would still like to see her. She told him she went to church regularly, so if he wanted to see her, he could come to church and see her. He did not like the idea, but he came anyway. She still would not date him. As he came to church to see her, eventually he became a believer. Then she started dating him and later they were married. We need to be careful to do things God's way.

Christian young people and Christian parents both need to have this concept straight. Your young person may want to date an unbeliever, but who is in charge of your family? My kids do not have to do what I tell them, they only have to do what I tell them as long as they live in my home. Christian young people need to see things from God's perspective.

Marry Only a Submissive Believer

While we are discussing various aspects of dating, there is another concept we need to clarify. Not only does the person a believer marries need to be a believer, the person needs to be a believer who is living for the Lord. Second Thessalonians 3:6 and 14 indicate if someone does not obey the instructions of the Word, believers should have nothing to do with that person. So not only does the person you are intending to marry have to be a believer, the person must be a believer living in submission to the Word of God. That will take care of some of the problems and will clarify the relationships which are acceptable to many believers.

Sometimes young people begin dating another person who professes to be a believer, but whose life is not being lived according to the Word. The parent does not feel free to tell the young person not to date that professing believer because he at least professes to be a believer. But is that professing believer living his life in submission to the Word of God? If not, he is not an eligible candidate

for marriage to a believer who is living for the Lord. Some think if they maintain a relationship with the uncommitted professing believer, they will bring him back to the Lord. That is simply another excuse to get around what God says. Many a believer has married a professing believer whose life was contrary to the Word of God, only to find out later the professing believer was not a true believer at all. That was the reason his life was not according to the Word. He simply made an empty profession. Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 7:39 that believers are free to marry only other believers.

For Widows and Widowers

Paul concludes his statements on marriage as he talks about widows and widowers in 1 Corinthians 7:40: "But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God." One whose spouse has died is free to remarry, but there are benefits in remaining single. How then do you decide which is best for you? Paul says there are benefits in remaining single. The widow or widower now has time to devote to serving the Lord, time which was not available for that purpose while married. Some believing widows or widowers can be more effective in serving the Lord after the death of their spouse if they remain unmarried.

How does this fit with what Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:14, "Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep the house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach." Paul says in this passage that the younger widows will more likely have the sexual need for remarriage, so they ought to get remarried. Paul's advice to widows in 1 Corinthians 7:40 is properly addressed to older widows who, with the passage of time, may find the sexual desire easier to control. They are, therefore, in a better position to decide not to remarry, whereas the younger widows would still have the need for sexual fulfillment, thus marriage would be more of a necessity for them.

This does not mean that a widow or widower at age 70 who decides to remarry is sinning. It does not mean that we look down on them as if they would not need to remarry if they loved the Lord more. God has not given you the plan for their lives. He has not given the plan for your life to them. They have not violated any

Scripture if they choose to remarry. Neither have they violated any Scripture if they do not remarry. It is an open issue between each individual and the Lord.

We must all be brought back to the matter of understanding and appreciating one another as God has gifted each member of His Body. He has not given everyone the gift of showing mercy. Not everyone has the gift of pastor-teacher. Not all have the gift of celibacy. God has given you a gift that will make you especially effective for Him. Praise Him for that.

God has given some the gift of celibacy, the ability to lead a single life. If you are single and wish God would provide you with a marriage partner, maybe He will give you a partner in five years, one year or ten years. But I do not know that He will. You must realize that at this stage of life, God has not seen fit to give you a partner. Ask Him to help you devote your energies to serving Him to the fullest possible extent. That should be your attitude whether married or single. If, in God's time, He desires for you to be married, He will make that clear to you. If you have the strong need for sexual fulfillment, that is an indication that you should begin looking for the mate that God will provide for you. If He has given you the ability to live without sexual fulfillment, maybe that is His plan for you. If so, you can be most effective by remaining single.

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