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Sermon Notes

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God's Wise Instructions for Marriage

1 Corinthians 7:8-16

Last week we discussed the marvelous purposes of God in marriage, how God ordained it from the beginning of history for many blessed purposes... for

Partnership (freedom from loneliness)

Pleasure (the delights of marriage—Song of Songs)

Procreation (being fruitful and multiplying)

Purity (from sexual temptation)

Protection (from Satan's devices to do us harm)

Productivity (maximum fruitfulness on earth_

Portrayal (of Christ and the Church)

We also have seen how rapidly sin entered the world in Genesis 3 and how it has so significantly assaulted each one of these marvelous purposes

Martin Luther:

“Good God! What a lot of trouble there is in marriage! Adam has made a mess of our nature. Think of all the squabbles Adam and Eve must have had in the course of their nine hundred years. Eve would say, ‘You ate the apple,’ and Adam would say ‘You gave it to me!’”

Nine hundred years of arguing over it!!

But some of the deepest questions in life center around love, marriage, and family life

The Greco-Roman world had a twisted view of marriage, and the Corinthians had their own problems as a result

In the Roman world, there were four patterns of marriage

1) Slave marriage

There were many slaves, tens of thousands of slaves, they didn't have any of the rights of a citizen. Whenever two of them wanted to get married, or come together and in what really was just a living together rather than an official marriage, the owner of the slaves would agree to what was called a tent companionship.

The owner would say, "You two can live in a tent together," and that consummated a certain kind of slave marriage. But, if he didn't like how they were doing together, the slave owner could go in there and take them apart, or he could sell off the husband, or he could sell off the wife. There was no security for slaves married to each other.

So, you had a lot of real problems in the early Church because so many of the early Christians were slaves, and they would have had such mixed up marital backgrounds. Now, what is the early Church going to do?

What Paul did do was not try to break up everything, but to try to teach them the sanctity of the marriage that they had whatever the legal basis of it. If they were living together under a tent companionship arrangement, he would say to them, "Stay together. Prove yourselves true to one another. Love one another. Make everything of that marriage that God designed it to be"

2) Common law marriage

A woman and a man could live together for one year. At the end of the one year, they would become identified as husband and wife. The church would have had to face people who were common law married, who had no legal paper or ceremony to identify their marriage. And again, Paul doesn't say anything about what they ought to do other than the sanctity of the marriage that exists under whatever it exists, to maintain it.

3) Marriage by sale

The father sold his daughter to the husband. If the man could come up with the right price, he could have the daughter.

4) Patrician marriage (the highest form, among the nobility and aristocrats)

In this case the wife gave birth to the legal heir, but in many cases there was little or no love between husband and wife; more of a legal relationship for the sake of the estate. Frequently each of them would regularly have other sexual partners.

This was the situation generally in pagan society, and it was into this that the gospel of Jesus Christ came.

Beyond that, there were special pressures on the Corinthian church... there were the general sexual temptations of pagan religion, as we've discussed – the temple prostitutes, both male and female. Paul addressed this vigorously in chapter 6

Also, there were Christians in their congregation from Jewish backgrounds who would have felt that it was more than just normal to be married... they would almost go so far as to say a man who chose not to get married would be somehow a defective person, like something was wrong with him... or perhaps even secretly sinful. Like something was spiritual wrong with singleness

On the other hand, there were ex-pagans from a more philosophical background who would advocate the superiority of the life of the spirit over the lower drives of the flesh, and say that all sexual activity was corrupt... they would advocate celibacy for all single people, and say sex within marriage was a misguided waste of your soul. Some might even go so far as to advocate that Christian married couples should get divorced so they can purify their focus and spend their whole lives in service to Christ. This is all coming from the philosophy that SPIRIT IS GOOD and BODY IS BAD

Into this whole mess, the Apostle Paul is commissioned by God to speak timeless truths about marriage, first to the Corinthian church, then to us.

AND WE NEED IT! The understanding of marriage in the Western world is openly moving toward paganism and wickedness and dishonor... and the church is called on to be the light of the world

The divorce statistics are staggering and depressing:

In the United States:

Almost 50% of all marriages end in divorce

41% of all first marriages end in divorce

60% of all second marriages end in divorce

73% of all third marriages end in divorce

The average first marriage that ends in divorce lasts about eight years

BUT the United States has only the sixth highest divorce rate in the world... the highest is in Russia... approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of all Russian marriages end in divorce

Beyond all of these staggering and depressing statistics is the reality of what divorce does to the children and to the extended families and friends and churches of the couple

The costs are staggering... but the problems are not new. The Corinthians faced their own problems with marriage as we have seen; and only the Word of God has the wisdom to help us navigate these stormy seas

In 1 Corinthians 7:8-16, Paul addresses four categories of people in the Corinthian church... and his words are timeless and relevant, for each one of you will be in one of these four categories as well

- 1) Those who are presently unmarried (of various categories) (vs. 8-9)
- 2) Christians who are presently married to other Christians (vs. 10-11)
- 3) Christians who are presently married to non-Christians who are willing to stay married (vs. 12-14)
- 4) Christians who are presently married to non-Christians who are unwilling to stay married (vs. 15-16)

Though Paul's words will not cover every possible angle when it comes to marriage, yet they are a very good place to start!!

I. Commands to the Unmarried (vs. 8-9)

1 Corinthians 7:8-9 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

A. Explaining this Category

1. Simple term "unmarried" along with a specific term "widows" probably best to take as a broad category of all the adults in the congregation who are not presently married, both male and female
2. Widows are singled out because they were a special case in the ancient world, so there is some redundancy in the phrase "unmarried and widows"... all widows are obviously unmarried!

3. So this category would be all single people who have never been married, and people who were married at one point and now are no longer married

B. Paul's Basic Advice: Stay Unmarried

1. 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 Paul gives the strongest defense for godly singleness in the Bible... the value of staying single if you can do so with a pure heart and without strong feelings of temptation
2. Also in this chapter, Paul is going to consistently advocate CONTENTMENT within your earthly situation... be content as a married person and live well for the glory of God, not trying to change your situation; be content as a single person and live well for the glory of God, not trying to change your situation; be content even if you are a slave... don't let it trouble you, but if you can gain your freedom, do so... (vs. 21)
3. Bottom line, BE CONTENT with your lot in life and live for the glory of God!!

C. Paul's Own Example

1 Corinthians 7:8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.

1. It is quite possible that Paul was a widower, not a man who had never married
2. To be in the Sanhedrin, it would have been necessary for Paul to have been married
3. Perhaps his wife died before he was converted; we don't know
4. In any case, he advocates the benefits of a single life FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
5. He was completely free to serve the Lord, and especially free to lay down his life and even DIE for Christ, without worrying about a wife and children he would have left behind

In Acts 21, Agabus the prophet clearly predicted that Paul, if he went to Jerusalem, would be arrested and bound and imprisoned and handed over to the Gentiles. All Paul's friends stood around Paul and pleaded with him not to go!!

Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

In the same way, Martin Luther, who as a monk had taken vows of celibacy, but later repudiated those vows as unbiblical, still didn't want to marry because he was under a ban by the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor

that he could be killed on sight by anyone at any time, without fear of punishment. For that reason, he thought it best never to marry, because he did not want to leave a widow and fatherless children behind... but God later opened the door for him and Katie von Bora to get married

6. SO... Paul here in his chapter vigorously refutes the Jews who would have thought that only weird and defective people remain single for life

D. BUT the Limitation... CAN YOU BE SELF-CONTROLLED??

1 Corinthians 7:9 But if they (the UNMARRIED) cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1. God gives to some people the gift of singleness; essential to that is the ability to live peacefully without sexual involvement; no strong desires in that direction... that's obviously not the norm
2. Paul says the test is your PASSION... are you burning inside with desire? If so, it is better to marry than to live under the pressure of constant temptation

E. Question: What If I Haven't Received Either Gift Yet?

1. I think I am one of those people that God means to be married; I know that I lack self-control; I am not meant for the single life... BUT I haven't found the right person yet
2. Well, it is true that it is better to marry than to burn, but it is also true that it is better to burn with passion than to SIN
3. All sexual expression outside of marriage is sin; God is not giving any single person permission to indulge in sex outside of marriage ever
4. So, if you haven't received your gift yet, then
 - a. Put sin to death by the Spirit (Romans 8:13)
 - b. Avoid tempting situations: "Lead us not into temptation" (Mt. 6:13)
 - c. Know that God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear but will make a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13)
 - d. Pray daily for a godly spouse... "What God has joined together"; God made Eve and brought her to Adam
 - e. Concentrate not so much on FINDING the right person but BEING the right person
 - i) Young men: develop the kind of character and lifestyle and fruitful life direction that a godly Christian woman would WANT to follow

ii) Young women: be the kind of woman a godly man would yearn to marry

f. Be active, active, active in serving the Lord and others; so many Christian marriages happen in the context of serving in a local church... while doing ministry together

II. Commands to Married Christians (vs. 10-11)

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹ But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

A. What Does Paul Mean by “Not I, but the Lord”

1. Paul is clearly NOT disagreeing with Jesus here!
2. He has a direct teaching from the Lord Jesus on this topic; from the ORAL TRADITION
3. Keep in mind that the gospels had probably not been written yet!
4. Paul is saying Jesus DIRECTLY taught on divorce multiple times

B. Christ’s Clear Teaching on Divorce

Matthew 5:31-32 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

C. Paul States it Simply

1. First to the Christian wife: “a wife MUST NOT separate from her husband”...
2. Paul doesn’t go into the exception clause for when divorce IS acceptable, namely, if there has been sexual sin
3. Just simply, a Christian wife must not separate herself from her husband
 - a. Divorce is devastating to people
 - b. God says in Malachi 2:16 “I hate divorce!”
 - c. So, Christian couples must stay together
 - d. He adds in verse 11, “A husband must not divorce his wife”

D. Why Does He Add “But If She Does...”

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹ But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

1. Probably divorces had already happened... the horse was already out of the barn
2. If that is the case, and a Christian has gotten a divorce without suitable grounds, she must seek to undo the wrong by being reconciled to her husband... or else REMAIN UNMARRIED for the rest of her life
3. This is how seriously God takes marriage and divorce

E. Reb Bradley: Work It Out

1. God intends to shut couples up within a room and force them to solve their problems by love and forgiveness and prayer and self-denial and the Holy Spirit

Reb Bradley: "Work it out!"

III. Commands to Christians Married to Non-Christians Who Want to Stay (vs. 12-14)

1 Corinthians 7:12-13 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.

A. Paul's Apostolic Authority ("I say this... I, not the Lord")

1. Jesus never addressed this topic... Paul does so on his own
2. BUT he does so by the power of the Holy Spirit

B. Topic: MIXED MARRIAGES

1. First, no single Christian should ever marry a non-Christian

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

1 Corinthians 7:39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

2. However, God often makes mixed marriages by converting just one of the spouses... the other person may well be converted later, but not necessarily
3. In the meantime, what should the Christian spouse do in such a challenging situation??

4. Ancient writers in the Christian era (like Tertullian) spoke of the challenges when a woman would become a Christian without her husband, and he would have a whole new life, new convictions, new friends, new style of worship... he didn't understand any of it
5. Some might have thought, why not just divorce the unbeliever and get a fresh start with a wonderful Christian spouse?
6. But see what a devastation that would be in society, and how poorly Christianity would look... like a homewrecker!

C. This Situation: The Unbelieving Spouse WANTS to Stay Married

1. Paul says STAY MARRIED! Keep the marriage intact!
2. Yes, it's going to be challenging, but it is God's best, if the unbelieving spouse is happy in the marriage

D. The Family Life is SANCTIFIED by the Believer

1. Some might say, "Won't I be spiritually defiled by my unbelieving spouse? I'm a member of the Body of Christ... my spouse is not..."
2. What about our children? Wouldn't they be like spiritual HALF-BREEDS, with one believing parent and one unbelieving parent?"
3. Paul makes an amazing statement

1 Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

4. Paul is saying that, in some very powerful way, the presence of a single Christian in the home SANCTIFIES the home... not in the sense of making the unbelieving spouse a Christian, or truly holy in the eyes of the Lord... the same with the children; just that a believing wife or believing husband is light shining in the darkness, the fragrance of Christ, a POWERFUL INFLUENCE

IV. Commands to Christians Married to Non-Christians Who Want to Leave (vs. 15-16)

1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

A. Paul Addresses the Opposite Case: The Unbeliever Leaves

1. The person can't stand living with the Christian spouse and goes away; desires a divorce
2. Paul makes it clear that the believing spouse should not make some extreme efforts to stay married to a person determined to leave

B. “Not Bound” = No Longer Married

1. Much controversy about these verses, but Paul is speaking of marriage bounds here

Romans 7:2 by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.

2. In 1 Cor. 7, the believing spouse is no longer BOUND to the unbeliever who wants to leave
3. That means the person is FREE to remarry!

C. Paul’s Reason: God has called us to LIVE IN PEACE

1. The endless strife and conflict in a divided home is dishonoring to God
2. The unbeliever does not love Christ, does not want to pray, does not want to raise the children in the Lord, does not want to go to church, does not want to offer hospitality in the Lord... there is a continual WAR... that is not glorifying to the Lord

D. Uncertain Spiritual Outcome

1 Corinthians 7:16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

1. The best motive the believing spouse could have would be to see their spouse converted
2. But Paul says plainly YOU DON’T KNOW THAT THAT WILL EVER HAPPEN!
3. Only God can convert another person to faith in Christ
4. The “sanctifying” influence of the believing spouse in the home is actually repugnant to that person
5. Let the person go and move on with your life.

V. Applications

A. Praise God for the Clarity of His Word

1. So very specific about the most important issues in our lives

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

B. Bring this Area Before God in Prayer

1. What circumstance do you find yourself in concerning marriage and singleness?
 2. Have you heard a word from the Lord today? Ask God to work his truth powerfully into your life
- C. Marriage is One of God's Greatest Blessings... Delight in the Various Purposes of God in it
- D. BUT Marriage can also cause immense heartache... come together with your spouse in prayer for God's best in your marriage
- E. To the Non-Christian: Find forgiveness and love in Christ!