

# CCLEB SERMON NOTES

SUNDAY JULY 7, 2024  
1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-24

PASTOR THOM KELLER

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## **GUIDELINES FOR THOSE MARRIED, UNMARRIED, AND WIDOWS**

I'd like to start with a very special announcement today. First of all, I mentioned this before, but I'd like to thank all of you for allowing my wife and me to take a sabbatical earlier this year and for your faithfulness in praying for us during that time. We had a wonderful time camping. It was a whole new experience for me, and I loved being in close proximity to my wife. A camper is a perfect setting for closeness if you've not experienced it.

During this time away, something that was made abundantly clear is that Calvary Chapel has a very gifted leadership team that enabled the church to carry on during my sabbatical without skipping a beat. I expected that; I made plans months before I left for the sabbatical, so I was really looking forward to hearing their comments when I returned.

A few weeks ago, the elders met with the advisory team, and I really liked what one of them said: "During your sabbatical, the leadership team under Duane's leadership found its own rhythm." I really like that.

Some of you may remember from my announcement back in October of last year that Sue and I are 70 years old. My decision to step down as senior pastor is driven by Sue and my desire to be able to spend more time together. We are really enjoying it. I hope she is—I think she is.

As I have prayed about stepping down, I am very confident that Duane and the leadership team, working alongside him, have the gifts and abilities that will enable Calvary Chapel to move to the next level. I believe that with all my heart. Duane has been in Calvary from the very beginning—24 years now—and there is no one else who could possibly come close to checking off all the boxes that this church would want to see in their next senior pastor. That's one of the reasons I feel confident about Calvary's future as I step down as senior pastor.

Duane and the elder team have always been in lockstep as it relates to the vision here at Calvary. Maintaining the original vision is critically important for the fellowship to continue through a senior pastor transition without feeling that the rug has been pulled out from under them. I know that the elder team and Duane share this vision.

So, as I step down, all functions of the senior pastor will fall under Duane's jurisdiction as the new senior pastor, including the primary teaching role that I have held on the teaching team. Any ongoing church concerns should be directed to Duane. If you bring these to me, I will simply redirect you to Duane and the elder team as appropriate.

What will my new role be? Well, it begins with my new role at home. I look forward to spending more time with Sue, away and at home. Sometimes we will be traveling for weeks over the winter, probably months at a time. We are really enjoying our time together. I plan to cut back to serving a few days a week when available, in the role of counseling, some occasional teaching on Sunday mornings and Monday nights. I was also asked to continue overseeing the radio ministry, which I absolutely love.

As far as the discipleship class on Tuesday evenings, Duane and I will be sharing the responsibilities of that class. I will also continue to be available for counseling on a limited basis, as well as weddings and funerals, with weddings being scheduled through the church office.

Some of you may have heard that it's best when a senior pastor steps down that he leaves the church. Although this does happen in many instances, the counsel we received was that the best model is actually where, when the senior pastor steps down, he remains in the church. However, this absolutely requires him to stay in his lane, which means that if you come to me with church concerns or requests or seeking approval for something, I will redirect you to Duane and the elder team. A pastor stepping down must become the new senior pastor's number one cheerleader—maybe number two after his wife. My role is to support him in every way that I can, and that's an easy role for me to fulfill because I so believe in Duane.

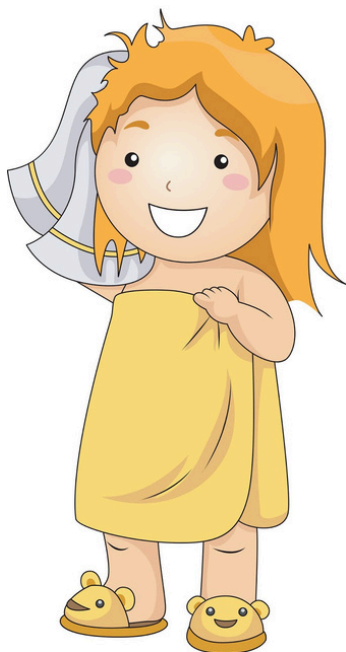
I've had a lifetime of experience with this. When I took over the dealership, I always appreciated that the president of the dealership, my father, did not countermand or challenge my decisions. So I guess my title going forward would be semi-retired, serving under the authority of both Duane and the elder team.

As far as a timeline for this transition, Duane has already been leading the elder meetings, and he has done a phenomenal job. Not only is Duane a gifted teacher, but some of you may not know he is also a very, very gifted administrator. There is no doubt in my mind that God has raised Duane up for such a time as this, to be used by God to take Calvary Chapel to the next level.

As for the actual transition date, we plan to dedicate our new building on Sunday morning, October 27th. The following Sunday, November 3rd, it will be my absolute thrill and delight, along with the elder team, to install Duane Miller as senior pastor.

I would be remiss if I did not share what an absolute joy it has been—that is the understatement of the world—for Sue and myself to serve this fellowship for the past 23 years. We love all of you, and we have felt such love coming from all of you through the years. It has been a wonderful and remarkable journey together. We're not going anywhere; I just want to add that little piece. Most importantly, Duane, the elder team, and I covet your prayers during this season. As you well know, prayer changes things, and God uses prayer to maintain unity and harmony in the lives of those who pray. So let's be faithful in our prayer through this transition time as well.

So that's my announcement. Let's get to the Word. Okay, we are in First Corinthians chapter 7. Do you know what the leading cause of dry skin is? Towels. Are you glad I'm stepping down?



# ***THE LEADING CAUSE OF DIVORCE IS MARRIAGE***

What's the leading cause of divorces? Marriage. That's right, and some treat divorce as such a quick and easy "get out of jail free" option. "God wants him to be happy" option. But the Bible never signs off on divorce as an easy option out. Does the Bible permit divorce? Yes, but with conditions. In today's lesson in chapter 7, Paul deals exclusively with practices and attitudes concerning singleness, marriage, and divorce.

## **Marriage, Celibacy, Divorce, Re-Marriage**

1 Corinthians 7:1-32

Now, before we read the first section, it is very important to note that in verses 1 through 5, Paul is expressing his opinion—his opinion. Paul is not speaking for God or making commands. Listen to **verse 6**: "But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment." So, know that each of these six verses are Paul's opinions

verses 1 through 6: "Now, regarding the questions you asked in your letter: Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations, but because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. Do not deprive each other of sexual relations unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt you so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command."

In verse 1, Paul says, "concerning the questions you wrote in your letter." What letter? Well, unfortunately, that letter is lost. The commentator Gail says this: "Though these false

prophets in the Corinthian church had greatly influenced the members of the church there, yet there were many among them that had a very great respect for Paul and kept up correspondence with Paul, in which they informed Paul of their doubts and difficulties." And something that's important is that we don't ever over-romanticize the early church as if they just had it all together. Listen to what Paul says in **2 Corinthians 12** about the Corinthian church. He's writing to the church: "I'm afraid that when I come again, God will humble me in your presence, and I will be grieved because many of you in the church have not given up your old sins. You have not repented of your sexual immorality and eagerness for lustful pleasure." That was going on in the church even after the first book of Corinthians.



In **verse 2**, starting out, Paul's opinion is that due to there being so much sexual immorality and immodesty throughout Corinth, each should decide to marry or not marry, using as a final arbitrator their ability to control their lust, as we read in **verse 9**. "But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust."

I'm going back to **verse 3**: "The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs." Consider the equality that Paul gives to the husband and the wife here. It might surprise some people: completely equal in rights and privileges. Listen again: the husband should not deprive his wife, and the wife should not deprive her husband. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and so each spouse equally is enjoined not to deprive the other of sexual relations.

LET THE HUSBAND RENDER  
TO HIS WIFE THE  
AFFECTION DUE HER, AND  
LIKEWISE ALSO THE WIFE TO  
HER HUSBAND.  
I CORINTHIANS 7:3



Now, on this actual issue of equality between husband and wife, John Calvin, who wrote extensively on marriage, said this (I'm paraphrasing): "But it may be asked why Paul here puts the husband and the wife on the same level instead of requiring the wife to show obedience and subjection. I answer: in other areas, a husband and wife differ both as to duty and as to authority, but in the matter of the marriage bed, the condition of both the husband and the wife is alike."

# PREPARING *for* MARRIAGE



*The Premarital Counsel of  
John Calvin*

EDITED BY SCOTT T. BROWN

In our Sunday morning gathering today, where children are present, I believe we'll just leave it at that, with just one postscript: in verse 5, Paul says, "Do not deprive each other so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control." I heard a pastor say one time that when a couple disregards this word from Paul and they each roll over to the edge of the bed, back to back, Satan places himself right in that bed between them and floods their minds with a variety of tempting, destructive, ruinous thoughts.



I ran across this clip this week from a well-known national pastor who fell into sexual sin. This is what he said: "How difficult marriage was for me at times when I felt my needs weren't being met. At times when I'm frustrated my needs were not being met, when I'm annoyed by things I shouldn't be annoyed by, is when my wife and I are sexually disconnected and we haven't talked about it, and we just kind of let it sit." Now again, that is no excuse for adultery, but this is extremely common. Be careful.

1 Corinthians 7:7 "But I wish everyone were single just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God of one kind or another."

Now, as a background, most Bible scholars believe that at one time Paul had been married. There are several evidences of that, but the most compelling one to me is that Paul had at one time been elected to the Sanhedrin. It was not allowed for a man to serve on that high court unless he was married. So, why was he not married now? Well, some say Paul's wife died, but more suggest that she probably left him when he converted to Christianity. You know how radical Paul was before he was saved, and how radical he was after he was saved. Can you imagine the earthquake that would have been to his family, his in-laws?

# WAS THE APOSTLE PAUL EVER MARRIED?

COMPELLING TRUTH

Now, the understanding of this entire chapter is the fact that Paul was convinced that the Lord was going to return during his lifetime, even momentarily. So, throughout this letter, he encourages the unmarried to put their hand to the plow and work before the night comes when work ceases. Don't get distracted with the needs of a marriage because his return is soon, which is the exact point he makes in the next section.



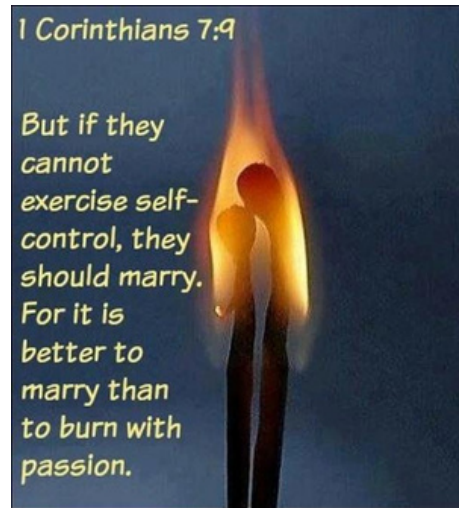
**Verse 8:** "So I say to those who aren't married and to widows, it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust." You know, you will sometimes hear people say that they have been given the gift of singleness. By that, they mean that they are not only content being single, but they actually prefer it. It says, "Yet each person has a special gift from God of one kind or another." Some prefer living unmarried.



Now, there can be a variety of very good reasons why God might give this gift of singleness to a person, but there is one sure and certain test to see if a person really has been given this gift.

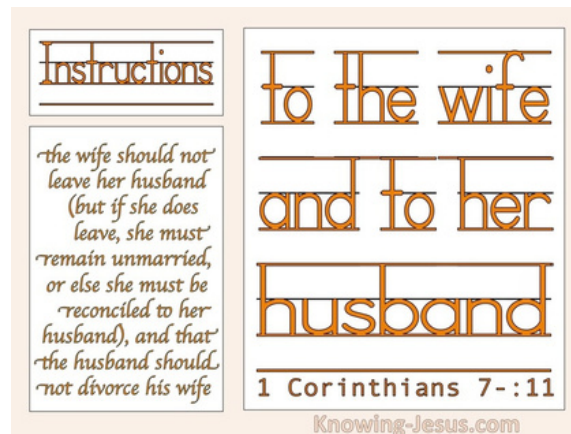
**1 Corinthians 7:9** "But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust." That's the test. And here, the entire system of ordaining supposedly celibate priests as leaders in the Catholic Church is proven to be a flawed system.

How do we know? How can we prove that? Because of those thousands of priests who have acted out sexually against children, against women, against nuns, and men throughout the centuries, who clearly did not have the gift of singleness or celibacy, because they obviously burned with lust as evidenced by their sexual sin. It's a flawed system that disregards Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 7**.



And now Paul turns his attention from the single to the married. I'd like you to note in verse 10 that Paul now moves from sharing his personal opinion to stating a direct command from God.

**Verse 10:** "But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord: A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him, and the husband must not leave his wife." Now, this is a direct command from the Lord. Paul says, believing partner, you are not to leave your believing spouse. But if you do leave, either remain single or return.



One important caveat here: Some denominations and some pastors say that even if your husband is abusing you or abusing the children, you stay in the home. We at Calvary do not hold to that position. If a husband is an abuser, the wife should move to a safe place. I would want that for my daughter. God wants that for His daughters. But with that caveat in place, listen again to **verse 11**: "But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband, and a husband is not to divorce his wife."

I know what some of you want me to say right now. You want me to tell you why the Bible really doesn't mean what it says here. But I can't and I won't because it says what it says, and Paul states that this is a direct command from the Lord. So, we see here that God's plan A for every marriage is for the partners to remain together through thick and thin.

Jesus addresses the same issue in **Matthew 19**, where he says, "This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together."



**1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (ESV)** To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

Now, I know for some of you who have gone through a divorce or divorce and remarriage, this subject is a difficult one for you to hear. But I believe that nearly all of you in that group would not want anyone to go through the pain of divorce if it can be avoided.

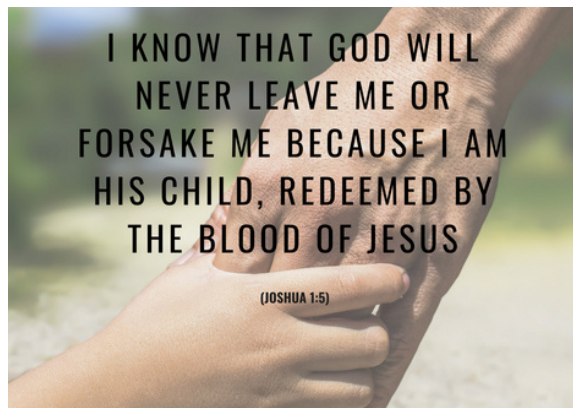


I almost always tell people who rather flippantly start throwing around the word "divorce" to their spouse, that's a dangerous time. When that word is thrown around, you had better really think this through because divorce always hurts a lot more than you can imagine. I remember Discipleship Magazine, maybe 20 years ago, did a four-article series on divorce. It was a good article, but what impacted me was the next month's issue. A woman wrote in regarding that article, who had gone through divorce, and she said something like this: "I appreciate your article, but there's one thing I'd like to say. When I went through my divorce, not a single person in the church talked to me about it. Not a single person in the church warned me about the pain I would go through. Not one person. Why didn't someone warn me?"

Because listen, folks, it's always more painful than you think it's going to be. I remember someone likening it one time to going out on a 10-degree below zero day, going up to a stop sign, and putting your tongue up against that stop sign. You leave part of you there, and that's what happens in a divorce. It's hard. It's hard on children. So, if you are considering getting a divorce and you come to one of the pastors here and want us to sign off on it, if it's not a biblically permitted divorce, we cannot. We will not sign off. We would be going against a direct command from the Lord, and one day we pastors are going to stand before the Lord and have to give an account for the counsel that we gave you if it's in conflict with what the Bible says.

However, we also believe that God does not turn aside from a believer if they divorce. Is it God's best for a couple to divorce? No, of course not. But God will not abandon you if you divorce. There will be consequences, to be sure, but one of those consequences is not God abandoning you. If you want to read more on this, I have some very good books. Email me, text me, and I can give you that information.



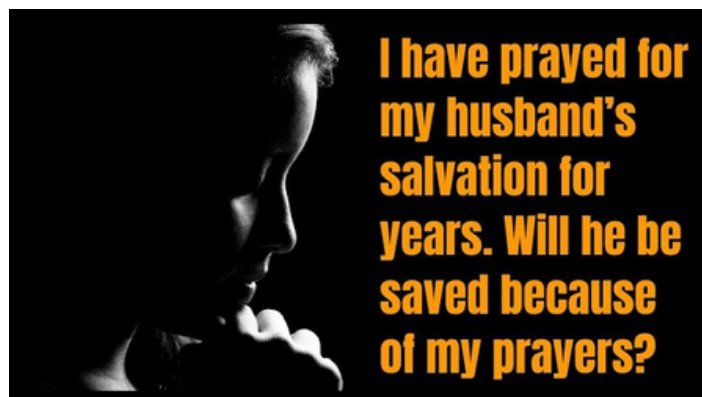


Going to **verse 12**: "Now I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. If a fellow believer has a wife who is not a believer and if a believing woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him. For the believing wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the believing husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy under the influence of the Christian spouse. But if the husband or the wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases, the believing husband or wife is no longer bound."



Let's go back to that for just a second. The believing spouse is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace. Here's the bottom line: If a believing spouse has an unbelieving spouse and that unbelieving husband or wife wants the believing spouse to stay, then stay. But if the unbelieving spouse wants to leave or divorce, the believing spouse should not fight them.

**Verse 15** in the ESV says this: "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace." John MacArthur says this: "When the bond is broken in any of these ways, a Christian is free to marry another believer. Throughout scripture, whenever a legitimate divorce occurs, remarriage is assumed. When divorce is permitted, so is remarriage."



If you remember when I taught on **John chapter 4**, I realized something I never saw before. When Jesus encounters a woman, in conservative Christian circles today, they say God never recognizes the second marriage after the first marriage is illegitimate, and yet Jesus legitimizes all five of those marriages because He said, "You were married; you had five husbands." Jesus acknowledged that all five of those were her husbands.

Next is a scripture that I many times quote to people who say they know that because they are praying for their unsaved husband or wife, that one day they will be saved. **1 Corinthians 7:16** says this: "How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?" You see, they have free will. God will not violate someone's free will to answer your prayer. He can put a lot of pressure on them; He can coordinate circumstances and events in their lives that push them in that direction, but He will not violate their free will.

One other point: If you're looking for a husband or a spouse, the Bible says do not be teamed up with an unbeliever. **2 Corinthians 6:14** says this: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"

When I was a youth advisor, we had kids in our youth group that were dating non-Christians. I'd say to them, "You shouldn't date a non-Christian." They'd say, "Why?" I'd reply, "Because you don't want to marry a non-Christian." They'd respond, "I'm not going to marry them; I'm just dating them." I love this statement: teenagers have the uncanny ability to apply flawless reasoning to a wrong conclusion. "Why can't I date an unbeliever? I'm not going to marry them." Where do you think it ends up? The same thing applies to you: don't be teamed up with an unbeliever.

**1 Corinthians 7:17**: "Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches. For instance, a man who was circumcised before he became a believer should not try to reverse it, and a man who was uncircumcised when he became a believer should not be circumcised. The important thing is to keep God's commandments."

Again, the overarching truth here is that God is not impressed by you checking off all the external boxes, claiming what you do externally as proof and evidence of your faithfulness to God. Rather, what God cares about is the internal condition of your heart.

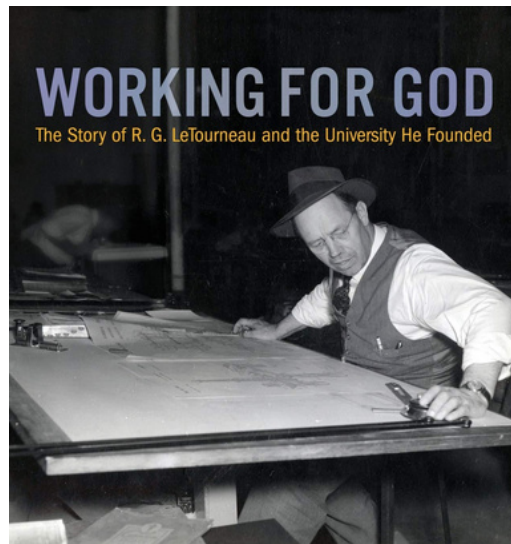


In **verses 20 to 24**, he says this: "Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you. Are you a slave? Don't let that worry you, but if you get a chance to be free, take it. And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord, and if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. God paid a high price for you, so don't be enslaved by the world. Each of you, brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you."

So many people, when they first get saved, are like a squirrel in front of a car—they're just all over the place. "Should I quit my job? Should I go do this? Should I leave here?" Paul says, "Just stay where you are. If there's nothing immoral or unethical, just don't get all jammed up about it." God doesn't waste anything from your past. You will find, as I once did when I was young and now old, that God does not waste anything you've been through. Many times, the direction He takes you is somehow connected to where you've been. Not always, but more often than not.



R.G. LeTourneau was radically saved in his mid-life, and he wondered, "What should I do?" His pastor said, "God needs businessmen too." The same idea of staying settled is found in verse 24: "Each of you, brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you."



In **verse 25**, Paul now shifts back to once again sharing his opinion concerning single people contemplating marriage.

**1 Corinthians 7:25:** "Now regarding your question about the young women who are not yet married, I do not have a command from the Lord for them, but the Lord in his mercy has given me wisdom that can be trusted, and I will share it with you. Because of the present crisis," he means the lateness of the hour, the imminent return of Christ, "I think it is best to remain as you are. If you have a wife, do not seek to end the marriage. If you do not have a wife, do not seek to get married. But if you do get married, it is not a sin, and if a young woman gets married, it is not a sin. However, those who get married at this time will have troubles, and I am trying to spare you these problems."

Now, really, this is the same point Paul made earlier. Due to the soon and imminent return of the Lord, which he thought would happen momentarily, Paul says, "Now, it is only my opinion, but I think it might be better to remain single so you can serve the Lord with single-minded devotion considering His return."

Then, in **verse 29**, Paul says that married couples should not let the distractions of life keep them from doing the Lord's work. He says, "But let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: the time that remains is very short. So, from now on, those with wives should not focus only on their marriage. Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions. Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them, for this world as we know it will soon pass away." There he has it: "I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking about how to please Him."



In **verse 33**, Paul makes a point that is very profound and applicable to every married man and every woman here. He says that a married couple should not let the distractions of life keep them from the Lord's work. A married man or a married woman who sacrifices their relationship with their spouse or children for the sake of ministry is committing a sin. A married Christian who sacrifices their marriage, their spouse, or their children for the sake of ministry is committing a sin.



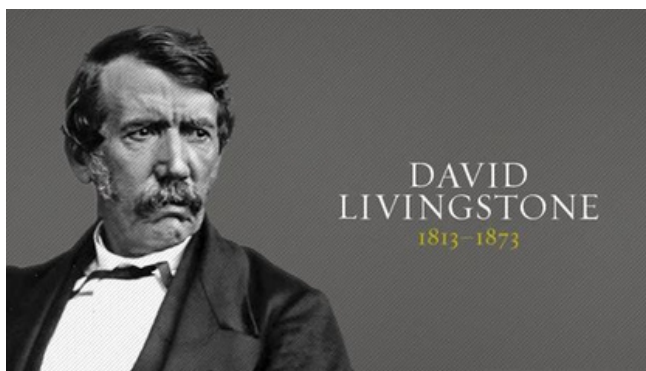
Listen to **1 Corinthians 7:32**: "An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please him. But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided." In the same way, here's equality again: "A woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and spirit. But a married woman," **verse 33** says, "has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband."

This echoes the command that God gives to the husband in **Ephesians chapter 5**, where he says, "Husbands, this means love your wives just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her." I've often said, once married, your wife or husband becomes your primary number one ministry focus above all else, because you will never have a ministry worth having if you don't have a marriage worth keeping.



You know, stories about missionaries in the 1800s and maybe early 1900s in the States who went to foreign lands to do their ministry left their families behind. David Livingstone is a famous missionary to Africa. Listen, Livingstone realized that his planned journey across Africa would be too rough for his wife Mary and their four children, of whom the eldest was six. So he sent them to Britain, intending that they stay at his parents' home in Scotland. He expected the separation to last two years and planned for his family to live on his meager missionary salary. Of this decision, Livingstone wrote, "The act of orphanizing my children, which now becomes painfully near, will be like tearing out my bowels, for they will all forget me."

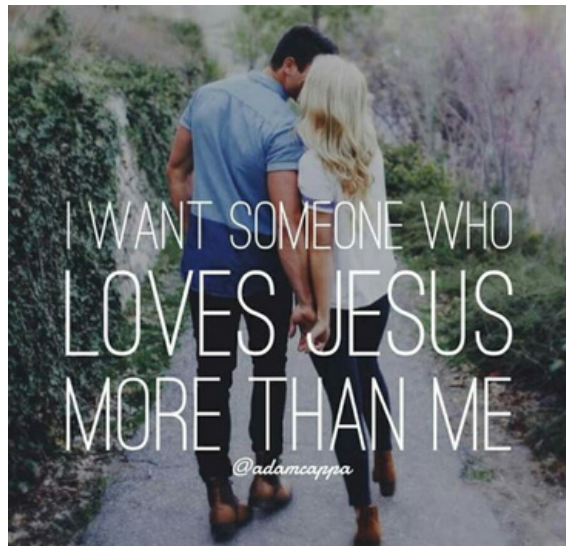
The separation stretched to four and a half years. It proved impractical for Mary and the four children to stay in his parents' tiny cottage. As a result, Mary led a wandering life with the children, moving from boarding house to boarding house. Stress and loneliness led Mary to a drinking problem, which continued until she died. It only compounded her poverty, and when she became seriously ill in 1854, she could not even pay for her medical care. Mary begged her husband repeatedly to return, but he refused. Instead, this reply came back from him: "Hope you give much of your time to the children. You will be sorry if you don't."



Is that a hero? That's not a hero to me. Not to me. But those stories abound, and Paul summarizes this thought. I'm sorry, some biographies applaud these men as heroes, as examples to follow, sacrificing their wives and children for the cause of Christ. Where is that in the scripture?

You might point to **Matthew 10:37**, which says this: "If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you're not worthy of being mine. If you love your son or your daughter more than me or your wife, you're not worthy of being mine."

But here is the truth: if you love the Lord more than your spouse, it will make you a better spouse. I am so glad Sue loves Jesus more than she loves me because by loving him more, she can love me more than if she didn't, if she had that order reversed. Did you get that? And listen, if I love Jesus more than Sue, out of my love for Jesus, it makes me want to take care of this precious daughter of his.



Folks, this has very practical applications and is a fair tool to make family decisions. Are you putting your wife at the top of your decision list? Are you putting your husband at the top of your decision list? It's kind of a rock-paper-scissors thing in the economy of God. We might list priorities differently and think caring for my wife isn't at the top of that list.

Then in **verses 35-38**, Paul says, "I'm saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best with as few distractions as possible. But if a man thinks he is treating his fiancée improperly and will inevitably give in to his passion, let him marry her as he wishes. It is not a sin. But if he has decided firmly not to marry and there is no urgency and he can control his passion" – there's that test again – "he does well not to marry. So the person who marries his fiancée does well, and the person who doesn't marry does even better."

In **verse 39**, again Paul says he is speaking for the Lord, but in **verse 40**, he now goes on to share his opinion: "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies," she is free to remarry, "but in my opinion, it would be better for her to stay single. And I think I'm giving you counsel from God's Spirit when I say this." Paul's point is that technically, once your spouse dies, you are free to remarry. But practically, the New King James Version says, "She will be happier if she remains as she is."



Now, there's nothing wrong with getting remarried after a spouse passes. I just want to give one word of caution here: when you are young and you marry, you marry for love. I know that's true. Other motivations can jump in front of that. Just be careful. Just be careful.

Women can be easily snookered; men can be easily snookered; I can be snookered. I remember a woman in her forties who divorced her husband. About a year later, she married a businessman, and I heard her tell one of her friends before they got married, "He's my retirement plan." How do you think he would have felt about that if he had heard it? Just be very careful. There's no sense in not being careful.

So how does today's lesson apply to me? First application, concerning the marriage bed: be very careful that you don't invite Satan into your bedroom by ignoring Paul's admonition in this matter.



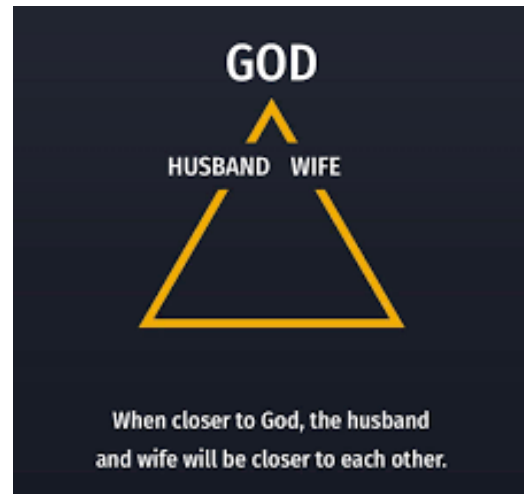
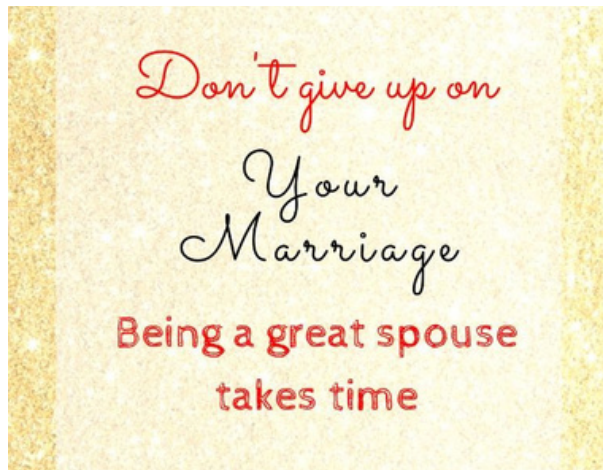
Second application, and this is a summary of a huge section of Paul's scriptures, if you feel that God has given you the gift of singleness as evidenced by your lack of needing a marriage partner, that is pleasing to the Lord. In many ways, he becomes your marriage partner. But if you are married or believe that you need a spouse in order to be fulfilled, God is equally pleased with your choice, provided you make your spouse and children your primary number one ministry ahead of all other ministries.



I believe this is why in **1 Timothy**, God actually makes this very same issue a qualification for serving as a pastor. He says that the pastor should be someone who manages his household well and has children who respect and obey him. I used to think this passage was a punishment that a pastor received if his household was unruly—that God would strip him of his pastoral duties. I don't believe that is the point God is making here. I believe God is saying if your children don't respect and obey you, you need to shift your priorities from the church back to your family. You need to go back and make your family your primary focus. You can return, but that needs to be primary. It's not a punishment; rather, it's a redirection of ministry focus.



The third application: please remember it's always too soon to give up on a marriage, and we should encourage couples to try again. Here's the truth: short of abuse, listen closely, short of abuse, you will never regret that you tried longer to keep your marriage together. You will never regret that you tried. And I know this: it is God's will for every single marriage to survive and thrive. That doesn't mean every Christian marriage will survive and thrive—it takes two—but it does prove that there is a way for every marriage to survive and thrive if both fully submit to the Lord. God would be a very cruel God if he said it is my will for your marriage to survive but provided no way for that to happen. That means there's always a way.



I met a man one time; he and his wife were close to divorce, and I said to him, "What percentage of this messed-up marriage is your fault?" He said, "90%." I said, "Man, that is really good news." He said, "That's really good news?" I said, "Yeah, because if you can change 90%, that's really, really good news. God's plan A is for you to become more like Jesus and let him take care of everything else."

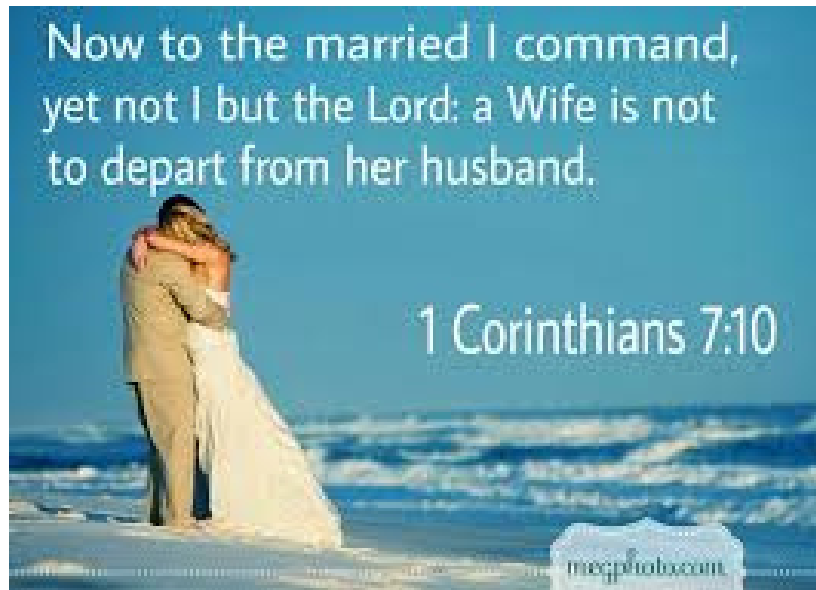


Is your marriage struggling? Are you thinking about divorce? In a study done of couples, 86% of people who said they were in bad marriages but decided to stick it out said that five years later, they were now happy. Sixty percent who were contemplating divorce and stuck it out said that five years later, their marriages were now very happy. A stronghold is defined as a mindset impregnated with hopelessness that causes a believer to accept something unchangeable that he or she knows is contrary to the will of God. Listen again: you may have a stronghold thinking, "Our marriage can't improve." A stronghold is a mindset impregnated with hopelessness that causes a believer to accept something contrary to the will of God. Five years later, 86% said they were happy. That should break that stronghold.



Now to the married I command,  
yet not I but the Lord: a Wife is not  
to depart from her husband.

1 Corinthians 7:10



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