**“***Undivided Devotion to the Lord***”**

*Being the Church –* 1st Corinthians 7

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 Raphael Giglio 2-15-22

As we study “Being the Church” we are asking God to show us how to be the church that honors and pleases Him and operates according to His Word.

We are studying 1st Corinthians to help us do that. Paul wrote the letter while he was in Ephesus to “the Church” he planted in Corinth,

***LAST WEEK:***

**1st Corinthians 6:1-9 “**If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord’s people? **2**Or do you not know that the Lord’s people will judge the world?

Last week Paul was making the statement that we are not to allow ourselves to be judged by the people of the world who don’t seek the Lord, we are those who live by the spirit, therefor have the wisdom and authority of the spirit of God, we are to judge the world, not them judge us.

**1st Corinthians 6:4“**Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church.”

We were reminded to be careful not to allow the world’s value system to be our guide and rule of life, we answer to a higher authority and have a deeper source of wisdom through the Holy Spirit in the kingdom of God.

Chapter 7 focuses primarily on marriage. It’s important to note that while it may be God’s perfect will for many to be married, we will see in this chapter that it’s not His will for everyone to be married, in fact Paul seems to encourage people to stay single if they can.

You will see throughout Corinthians, particularly in this chapter, that Paul does quite a bit of **acquiescing** *and* **deferring** (complying and conceding), on specific scenarios.

He uses a lot of language that imply that he is putting forth His opinion in some cases but always yielding to what he knows is God’s word concerning the matters he is presenting;

* v. 6 – “I say this as a concession, not as a command.”
* v. 10 - “*I* say this (*I*, not the Lord)”
* v. 12 – “To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord)
* v. 25 - “I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment”
* v. 40 - “according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God.”

It seems like Paul is vacillating between his own opinion and the Word of God. How are we supposed to receive it all as the Word of God?

Here’s the key, in all his epistles Paul is teaching. In other words, he is, for the most part exegeting what he has; read in scripture, received through the apostle’s teaching and what was *revealed to him by the Lord*. The epistles themselves are the teachings (the sermon notes), so when we preach on these teachings we are sort of offering teachings on his teachings.

There are times however, when he is actually presenting words that Jesus spoke, (in this case regarding marriage – Matt 19) here he makes it a point to clarify to the reader which of these commands are Jesus’ own words.

In Corinthians, Paul’s words can be classified into three different categories:

* His opinion,
* His commands,
* The Lord’s commands.

When Paul says “I, not the Lord” and “Not I, but the Lord” he is simply distinguishing between a command that originated with him, and a command that originated with Jesus, both of which are important, and for our purposes, both are considered the “Word of God”.

In fact in chapter 14 Paul affirms that these words are the Lord’s commands;

**1 Cor. 14:37** “If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that *what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.”*

In fact Peter himself tells us to consider Paul’s writing as “scripture”;

**2 Peter 3:16** “He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the *other Scriptures*, to their own destruction.”

**The Text:**

**1st Corinthians 7:1-7 “**Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” **2**But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. **3**The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. **4**The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. **5**Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. **6**I say this as a concession, not as a command. **7**I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”

He starts this chapter with “Now for the matters you wrote about…”, meaning that apparently they sent him a letter asking him for guidance on certain matters, particularly those having to do with marriage and sexuality. *(It would be interesting read that letter and see what they actually wrote) : )*

He replies in this section with three responses:

1. Sexual relations should *only* take place within the confines of marriage.
2. In certain marital situations, separation is appropriate but only temporarily for an agreed amount of time and for the purpose of prayer. (*This is sometimes a way to help a troubled marriage, but separation should never be open-ended and it should always be with the purpose to seek God about the marriage*).
3. “I say this as a *concession*, not as a *command*… *I wish that all of you were as I am*.” In this case he is saying that his particular preference is “I wish that you were all single like me – but I know that’s not for everyone, because everyone is different”.

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

**10**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.

**12**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. **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.

**15**But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. **16**How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Those with unbelieving spouses should remain with them, the goal is that they would be brought close to Jesus and possibly even saved through your constant witness and the exposure to the word of God.

*[ My Mom, a strong Christian woman, could have biblically divorced my unbelieving Dad later in life, and seriously thought about it. He ridiculed her faith and criticized her constantly about being a Christian. She felt that the Lord wanted her to remain in the marriage however and endure the hardship – toward the end of his life, after 50 years of marriage he accepted Jesus as Lord.]*

**17**Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. **18**Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. **19**Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. **20**Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

**21**Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. **22**For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave. **23**You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. **24**Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.**25**Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.

[Explanation]

 **26**Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. **27**Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. **28**But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

**29**What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; **30**those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; **31**those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

**32**I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. **33**But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— **34**and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ***35****I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”*

Our “*undivided devotion to the Lord*” is the most important thing in our life. Even beyond our devotion to our spouse and family. Paul is saying that anything in your life that can interfere with our undivided devotion to the Lord should, if possible be avoided. Seeking a wife/husband is a wonderful, honorable thing, *unless* it interferes with your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Also, Paul believed that “time was short”, in other words, the persecutions were escalating against Christians in Corinth, which would make it very difficult to start and raise a family there, AND he believed there was an urgency to prioritize ‘preaching the gospel’ in whatever remaining years they had left.

**1 Cor 7:28-29** “But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that *the time is short.”*

(Paul died less than 10 years after writing this)

**36**If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strongand he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. **37**But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. **38**So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does *better*. **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. **40**In my judgment, she is *happier* if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

It can appear that 1st Corinthians 7 is meant to be a marriage deterrent, it appears that Paul is saying that “if you are unmarried, good! It is “better” (v.38, You’ll be “happier” (v.40), keep all potential suitors in the *‘Friendzone’*.”

It seems to discourage anyone getting engaged or wanting to get married, but that is *not* the purpose of this chapter. It is merely showing us that our commitment to the Lord and devotion to him is the first priority in our lives, including marriage. It confirms however, the words of Jesus in Matt 19.

**Matt 19:4**“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ **5**and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? **6**So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Jesus goes on in this chapter to give very specific criteria in which divorce and remarriage are permitted.

Marriage can actually enhance your undivided devotion to God’s will for your life.

*[Notable Pastor’s Advice – My ministry enhanced AFTER I got married because my wife and I are partnered together to pursue the ministry God has for us… This is definitely the case for Aly and I.]*

I said last week that of all relationships that exist on earth, there is one that is referred to as *Holy Matrimony*, the relationship of a husband and wife. It is *intended to be* the *primary* relationship here on Earth. The one that God designed to be at the center of most families and that children come into the world. It is also the relationship that mankind’s most intimate physical expression of affection is reserved for.

Marriage:

Love – God’s purpose for creation / Marriage - *God’s purpose for procreation*

*God made the heavens and earth, land and trees, animals and plants, men and women, and saw that it was VERY GOOD.*

**Gen. 1:31** “Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was *very good!”*

*The first thing he said that was NOT GOOD, was for man to be alone.*

 **Gen. 2:18** “And the LORD God said, “*It is* *not good* that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

All Relationships are special but the relationship between a husband and wife is the most unique. Unlike a relationship between brothers and sisters, and Parents to children , the relationship between husband and wife is intended to be the quintessential relationship here on Earth.

It’s a relationship that is based entirely upon free will and choice. When people are born into the world they did not know one another and are completely separate. Once a man and woman meet and decide to join lives in marriage, they begin forming a relationship that will require them to prioritize each other above any every other person they know including friends, relatives, parents and children.

In God’s design, the epitome of love between human beings takes place within the confines of marriage. He ordains marriage to be a Holy Matrimony and Paul uses it as the example of how Jesus loves us:

**Ephesians 5:25** *“*For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her 26 to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word, 27 He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. 28 In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. 29 No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. 30 And we are members of his body. 31 As the Scriptures say, “A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” 32 This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. 33 So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself…

Everyone, regardless of whether they ever marry or not, can know this deep committed love, by understanding how much *Jesus loves all of us* as The Church (His Bride).

His love is unconditional and endless. Marriage is also intended to be a life-long selfless commitment that begins with the vow; *“’til death do us part”.*

Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world, many marriages, relationships and families have formed outside and or fallen outside of God’s pattern. There is so much hurt and damage that comes from broken relationships, particularly marriages. There are many people that are affected by divorce, abandonment, single-parenting, betrayal, etc.

The bad news is that these things are often the cause of much heartache and pain which leads to disruptive and reactive behavior, and affects the lives of all involved. Sometimes leading to deep wounds that effect their ability to love and receive love, especially children.

Maybe this describes you. Regardless of whose “fault” it is (even your own), divorce often brings a level of heartache that seems *unbearable* and *unhealable*, but that’s not true. *God can forgive all sins and heal all wounds;*

* **Psalm 147:3** “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”
* **Luke 4:18** (Jesus) *“He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted”*
* **Psalm 71:20-21** “Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. **21**You will increase my honor and comfort me once more.”

God wants you to be fulfilled in your relationships regardless of where you are at in this stage in life. The fulfillment however comes *not through another person*, but through “*undivided devotion to the Lord*”, and your relationship with him.

**It is never too late for a new start with God, He can restore your life regardless of what you’ve experienced through the years. You don’t need *anyone else* to fulfill your needs, only *Jesus himself*.**

**Regardless of your status, married, unmarried, engaged, divorced or widowed. God has a plan for you to have “*undivided devotion to the Lord”* and *Him to you*. There is no greater love than this, and no greater purpose for your life. <>**