



The Cross & Christian Marriage – Part 2

1 Corinthians 7:8-24

Today, we'll be in 1 Corinthians 7, if you'll open your Bibles to that place. If you don't know where that is, take a moment to look in the Table of Contents of your Bible. If you don't have a Bible, maybe there's someone sitting close to you that would let you look on, and I invite you to grab the Worship Guide that has some notes to follow along.

Let me just say as one of the teaching pastors here, thank you for the way you engage the preaching event. Just to see people with Bibles opened and following along and looking at God's Word—not trusting in the oratorical ability of men but looking to see what God says—that's such an encouragement. It helps us to preach, and I just want you to know how grateful I am.

While you're turning there, I am ecstatic to make an announcement to you this morning—put it on the screen up here so you that can see it—"The following sermon has been approved for all audiences." I just want to get that out there, okay? I know that that will be a relief to many of you who've been here the last three or four weeks. After last Sunday, it is certainly a relief for me to be able to let you know that as well.

We're still talking about marriage but just from a little bit different slant this morning. "The Cross and Christian Marriage"—we continue in 1 Corinthians. We're going to be studying together verses 8 through 24, but I want to begin just by reading verses 17 through 24, and then I'll show you why we start at that place.

So here's 1 Corinthians 7, beginning with verse 17: "*Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.*" Let me just insert something right there, just to get you to engage this a little bit more. I want you to count, just as you're following along, the number of times you hear the word "call" or some form of it in this passage of Scripture. You already see one there in verse 17. Paul says,

This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. (1 Corinthians 7:17-24)

When I was preparing for doctoral work, I studied the German language as a research language. Please, after the service don't come up to me and start speaking German—those of you that know it. I don't know it. I lost it. But I went on that journey of learning a little bit about it in preparation for research. And one of the things that the professor impressed indelibly on my mind was that in the nature of German grammar, the verb usually is somewhere down the line. In the sentence in most German sentences, it's not up front like it is in a lot of our sentences. So the key to understanding and translating a German sentence, in many cases, is to go find the verb, and then you're able to bring it back and it helps you interpret the sentence. I still wake up in cold sweats some nights hearing my professor say, "Go get the verb! Go get the verb because the verb is the key to understanding the sentence."

From about verse 8 through verse 24 of 1 Corinthians 7, this portion of this chapter is constructed much like a German sentence. The key to understanding it is down the line, and we have to go get it if we're going to understand what the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is saying in the first part of our text that deals with issues like marriage and divorce and remarriage and those types of things. If you just glance back, verse 8, "*To the unmarried and to the widows...*" Verse 10, "*To the married I give this charge...*" Verse 12, "*To the rest I say...*" Believers married to unbelievers in that paragraph right there—all of those three paragraphs right there dealing with this subject that helps us to know that this passage has something to do with marriage and remarriage and singleness and that type of thing.

But here's the deal. If we don't go down the line to this text that I just read a moment ago and grab ahold of it and bring it back, I'm afraid that we will miss what Paul is saying to us, what God would have us know about these issues that are sometimes tenuous. Here's one of the reasons we know that that connection has to be made: The word in my English text "*only*" at the beginning of verse 17. Paul begins the paragraph we read, "Only let each person do thus and so." So, he's been dealing with these different people in different situations related to marriage, and then he comes to this passage of Scripture, and he kind of bottom-lines it with regard to the common denominator of all of these things.

So, I want to go ahead and tell you something, and it's noted on your Worship Guide there. This is not an exhaustive study, in this text or in this sermon, of the issues of divorce and remarriage. Our elders have drafted an incredibly helpful document that is on our website that deals more fully with the biblical teaching on these subjects. There are some directions on how to get to it. I want to encourage you to that because there you're going to find treatment of different passages and different issues. There are some Q&A types of things, commonly asked questions. In looking for that, let me encourage you to go to that place.

But what I want to ask you to do this morning when we come to this text is let's let God say to us, with regard to these issues, what He desires, because there's something that is very specific here as it relates to different marital statuses. Let me also say that when we look at this in a minute, you're going to understand that what Paul puts on the table here applies to so much more than the marriage relationship. He's even going to illustrate that. So I want you to understand that this is bigger than just marriage and divorce and remarriage and those types of things. It has to do with every one of our lives with Christ in some way, form or fashion.

Principle of Status Quo

So, we come to this place right here, this paragraph, and I want us to begin with what I'm just going to call the principle of status quo. That's what this paragraph is about. Now, that's kind of weird, isn't it? Could status quo really be something positive? Could it be something good? Especially in a church like ours, where we talk so much about radical Christian living, is it possible that the term "status quo" has some place in that conversation? Well, I would suggest to you that the Apostle Paul says that status quo is not only a good thing, it ought to be the norm in the Christian life. Status quo simply means "current circumstances."

And what Paul is trying to do in a Corinthian culture in which many had come to know Christ, and all of a sudden realized this clash between the lifestyles they were living, and the culture they lived in with their newfound Christian faith, is he is seeking to speak into some of their lives, who were not just reacting for the sake of the gospel, but sometimes overreacting with regard to its implications in their lives. And what he's trying to do here is speak into that and then speak directly to the issue of marriage, because that's where it was happening the most. People were just turning their marital statuses upside-down with some misconceptions about the gospel.

So what is this principle of current circumstances, this principle of status quo? We might say it like this: The gospel always makes radical changes in your moral and spiritual life, but it doesn't always make radical changes in your circumstances. So out of that we give this charge: Consider sanctifying your present situation before you consider changing it. Now that's on your Worship Guide there. Let me say it again: The gospel always makes radical changes in your moral and spiritual life, but it doesn't always make radical changes in your circumstances. So here's the charge that grows out of that: Consider sanctifying your present situation before you consider changing it.

Now, Paul unpacks that in this paragraph, and he does it by putting a general rule on the table, appealing to God's character, and then challenging us with several gospel values.

The General Rule

So, I want you to see this. Let's start with the general rule. Here's the general rule that Paul is talking about in this passage of Scripture. General rule: Stay in the situation you were in when you were saved. That's the starting place. He identifies it in verse 17 as his "...rule in all of the churches." It becomes obvious in the passage of Scripture he's not being legalistic about it. He says, "This is the default. This is the general guideline. When you come to know Christ, as far as your circumstances are concerned, assume that you need to stay there. Stay in the situation you were in when you were saved."

We see this three times in this passage of Scripture. Verse 17, "*Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.*" Then in verse 20, "*Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.*" Verse 24, "*So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*"

It's kind of like a Big Mac sandwich. You've got this bread on the ends and in the middle, with the meat in between. We want to look at the meat. For those of you who are health nuts, a Big Mac is a hamburger that is sold by a place called McDonalds. I just don't want you to be lost—you see the golden arches on there, okay? So that's what we're looking at; that's kind of the structure of what he's doing right here.

Now, remember a minute ago when I read the text, I said, "Note the times the word 'call' is used"? Do you count them? Nine times in this passage of Scripture. In most English translations, it's translated with some form of the word "call". Eight of those times it's actually in the language of the New Testament, and used a ninth time in verse 20 when Paul says what is translated in my English translation as the word "condition." And eight of those times—with the exception of that one right there—eight of those times the Apostle Paul is talking about the calling of God to salvation. He is speaking to this issue of physical circumstances, setting, context, lots of different things related to that.

So Paul says very emphatically by repeating it three times, "When God calls you to salvation, when He tugs at your heart and shows you your need for Him and He calls you to Himself, then here's the general rule: Stay in the situation that you're in when you're called, when you're saved." And he repeats it three times; that's the general rule.

Now, in order to help his listeners understand what he's talking about, and that this doesn't just apply to marital status that he's been talking about, he gives a couple of examples. And I want to show you those examples, and then I want to throw out a couple more examples, just so we can kind of, maybe, get in our hearts and minds as we look at this the kinds of things the Apostle Paul is talking about.

He starts with what we could call "religious system". That might be one of those physical circumstances. Verse 18, "*Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.*" Not exactly sure how you do that, but they tell me there's a way. Paul says don't do it. "*Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.*" (1 Corinthians 7:18) Paul starts with the sign, if you will, of not only the Jewish religious system, but in their case, it was a sign of racial identification as well. And the Apostle Paul says, "Whatever situation you were in there, don't try to change that."

So he speaks to the issue of sometimes how we might find ourselves involved in a certain religious system that's not necessarily immoral, and it's not necessarily something that just is blatant heresy, but maybe different from where somebody else is. And the Apostle Paul uses that illustration right there, he grabs ahold of it, and he says, "Stay in the situation that you were in when you were saved." General rule.

His second illustration we might just call social standing. Verse 21, "*Were you a bondservant [a slave] when called? Do not be concerned about it.*" Some say, "If you can gain your freedom, if the opportunity presents itself, then take it." Right here, Paul basically says, "Don't try to change that." Now let me just kind of put a footnote right here, okay? Let me just tell you I don't believe when I read the New Testament that the Apostle Paul condoned everything that characterized the slavery system of this day, any more than you and I condone slavery in our nation's history. At the same time, there were some things about aspects of it in the Roman Empire that were more like the indentured servants of the Medieval day, parallel, to some degree, more of an employment situation. All of those things are in play.

But here's what we know. What we know is that Paul did not believe that that status had to change in order for you to serve Christ well, and this was what he was speaking into. His mission on the planet was not to turn over this social distinction of the day with all of its atrocities. His mission on the planet was to mobilize a group of people to take the gospel to the nations and impact their context with the gospel. So, he takes that example that we might just parallel to "social standing" in our day, and the Apostle Paul says, "Remain in that situation."

Now, let's just make sure we understand right there that the Apostle Paul is not suggesting that we be passive about certain abuses that we might run across. He would never call us to be passive with things like sex trafficking and physical abuse of another human being. Certainly the ethic of the Word of God would compel us to intervene in those situations.

But remember, general rule, Paul is talking about situations that we find ourselves in, in which we were in when we were saved, that are simply less than ideal. And he knows that the temptation, in a sincere desire to embrace the gospel and all of its ramifications, sometimes is to throw the baby out with the bathwater and think, "Okay, my situation is less than ideal. I want it to be perfect for the kingdom of God. The gospel demands that it be perfect. I need to change everything." And Paul says, "Time out. Not so much." General rule: Stay in the situation that you were in when you were saved.

We could add a couple more examples. I think about income stream and the related job situation. Let's put those two out there together. Isn't it true that sometimes a person comes to know Christ, and then they begin to feel guilty about how much money they're making? "That's too much for a Christian. It doesn't reflect well on the gospel." Or somebody else begins to feel guilty because they don't think they're making enough, because it doesn't allow them to give as much to the church or contribute to the advancement of the gospel among the nations. And there's this response and reaction that says, "I've got to change this."

Similarly with job situations, you look at them sometimes and say, "Boy, this is less than ideal. My working conditions are not conducive for my growth as a Christian and my faith. I hear language sometimes and the boss sometimes is doing some unethical things." We look at those things, and the temptation is to say, "I've got to get out of this. If I'm going to live for Christ well, if I'm going to advance the gospel, I've got to have a different situation." Oftentimes, there's reaction, maybe even over-reaction, based upon what Paul is saying here with regard to the ramifications that the gospel makes on our lives.

And then, we've got to add marital status to that list which Paul's dealing with in this text, and we're going to come back and apply this too, in a moment. But just be aware that this is a big one, and this is one of the reasons he's addressing it here is how the gospel affects certain situations with regard to marriage and divorce and remarriage and that type of thing. But before we go there, I want to make sure in this passage of Scripture we see a couple other things—this paragraph.

God's Character

I want you to notice how the Apostle Paul appeals to his assertion here: He appeals to the character of God. Let me show it to you, God's character in this passage of Scripture. Note this: That God is sovereign and faithful in your current circumstances. This is the thing that we've got to get if we're going to understand this. "How could Paul say this? How can he say, 'Hang with the status quo. General rule: Hang in your current situations?' How could he say this?" He said, based upon the character of God, that God is completely sovereign in and He is completely faithful in the midst of your current circumstances.

Notice it in verse 17. Paul says, "*Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has...*" I don't know how it's translated in your English translation. Mine says, "...assigned..." In the language of the New Testament, it speaks of the idea of dividing up and apportioning out, in the same way that God does spiritual gifts. Paul uses the same idea. He uses the same terminology to speak to the reality. And think about this, this is so cool. This room is filled with people who are waiters and waitresses; who are utility company workers and accountants and CEO's and carpenters and housewives, and people who work with their

hands and clothing industry and sales. On and on we could go. I could never even begin to scratch the surface of all of the occupations and the vocations that are represented, as well as all of the other life situations, the different income levels and the different job situations and all of those things that are represented in this.

And the Apostle Paul speaks of the call of God to salvation as being accompanied—listen to this—being accompanied with a life-assignment. Now, listen, that life-assignment doesn't mean it's lifelong. Don't misunderstand. He is simply saying that, just like the rest of your life, the condition that you're in when you get saved is no surprise to God. Do you ever feel that way? Do you ever feel like it must have happened this way: God says, "Well, I'm going to save John over there," and He calls him to Himself, and He says, "Whoa, man. I didn't realize he was in that job. What are we going to do with that?" No. Paul says, "The call of God—we know—it's His sovereign act. But don't miss the fact that He gives life-assignments and He's not caught off-guard by the physical circumstances of our lives when we are called into relationship with Him."

I want you to know, beloved, that the calling to be a preacher or a missionary by way of profession or how we put food on our table is not the only assignments God gives. They are not in a spiritual category that is above everything else. Every single one of us are the products of the sovereignty of God. And I want you to know, in your circumstances, when God calls you to Himself, He is completely sovereign and He has made assignments to each and every one of us with regard to the circumstances of our lives. Not only is He sovereign, but He's faithful.

Do you see the last verse? Look at verse 24 there. When Paul says this general rule the third time, "*So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain...*" Do you see it? "*...with God.*" (1 Corinthians 7:24) Isn't that interesting? Remember, he's given the issue as an example of circumcision and not circumcision. He's given the example already of slavery or being a freed man. And we know that there are other examples of things that characterize our circumstances that would fit into that. He comes to this place, and he says, "Whatever condition you're in, whatever circumstances you're in—remain there with God." What does he say? Not only is God sovereign over your assignment, not only is God not surprised by your assignment, but He is right there with you in it. He is faithful in the midst of whatever that assignment is.

And that is especially important to know when we find out that our assignment--we discover that our assignment is less than ideal—less than ideal circumstances. Because the temptation is to think, "God's caught off-guard. This is not God-honoring. God doesn't have anything to do with this. I have got to change everything." Paul says to remain there. Remain there, and as you remain there, know that you remain there with God.

Gospel Values

Then Paul does something else. General rule, appeals to God's character, and then he challenges his listeners to some gospel values based upon all of this other stuff. Do you know what those are? Remember grace, pursue holiness and reject entitlement; remember grace, pursue holiness, and reject entitlement. He mentions all three of those things. Look at verse 19 where he's talking about circumcision. He says, "*For neither circumcision counts...*" Note that word, "*counts.*" You ought to put a big circle around it. "*Neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision...*"

Do you know what Paul is saying? "You didn't get saved because you made a certain amount of money. You didn't get saved because you were or weren't part of the right denomination, the right religious system. You didn't get saved because you had this job

situation or that job situation. You got saved because of grace, because God in His grace sought you out and called you to Himself. That's how you got saved. And guess what," Paul said. "That doesn't change when you come into the Christian life. It's still by grace."

Do you know what that means? It means you're not going to please God any more if you get circumcised. You're not going to please God any more if you don't get circumcised. You aren't going to please God any more if you're a slave. You're not going to please God any more if you're a freedman. You're not going to please God any more if you have this income level or that income level. You're not going to please God any more if you sell everything you've got and move overseas. You're not going to please God any more if you buy a bigger house in Birmingham so you can host a small group there. You're not going to bring any more pleasure to God by changing your circumstances, because God is pleased with you in Jesus Christ.

And the temptation is—it's a temptation, isn't it?—whether we ever articulate it or not, sometimes, is to think, "Okay, I've got this gospel; this gospel demands everything. It calls me to Christ, to abandon all and it impacts every part of my life." And the temptation says, "In my current situation, there's no way I can please God in this. So I need to change it so I can get a better deal in order to please God." And understand, I think Paul completely got the fact that many of these Corinthians wanted to make these changes, this upheaval in their lives, for the sake of the gospel. They had good intentions. Paul says, "Remember. It's not going to make you any more pleasing to God." So remember grace.

Then, he says, "Here's what's important: Pursue holiness." That is the end of verse 19. You see it right there? But here's what matters: "*Keeping the commandments of God.*" Paul didn't believe in legalism. He didn't believe keeping the Old Testament law was necessary for salvation or for pleasing God. That's obviously not what he's talking about. He's simply talking about righteous living, holiness. He says, "Here's what matters. Let's pursue holiness. Instead of trying to figure out how you can completely turn your world upside-down and your family upside-down and your job situation, your income level upside-down, then just pursue holiness."

I feel like, all the way through here, I've got to keep coming back to make sure that we're not reading things into this that are not there. There are ways that we generate an income stream; there are job situations that God would never be honored at, that He would never call upon us to stay in. He would never want a Christian to remain in prostitution or pimping or racketeering or drug dealing or organized crime or any of those things. Certainly there are situations from a moral and spiritual standpoint that we are compelled to move out of. But Paul speaks into situations, circumstances that don't necessarily fit in that category. They're just simply less than ideal.

So he says, "Here's what you need to do. You need to remember grace and make sure that you're not going out changing your circumstances because you think you're going to be more pleasing to God if you do that. It's not the way you got saved, and it's not the way you live a Christian life. Now here's what you do in those circumstances: Just pursue holiness with everything that you have."

Then, the third gospel value—don't miss this one—is reject entitlement; passionately reject entitlement. This is what he says in verses 22 and 23, "*For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant [a slave] is a freedman of the Lord.*" He says, "Don't forget: If you're a slave, you don't have to think that getting your freedom is what's going to be the key to you serving the Lord well. You are free in all of the ways that matter. You're free in the Lord Jesus Christ." And then he turns around, and he says, "*Likewise he who was free when*

called is a bondservant [slave] of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants [slaves] of men." He says, "You were free when you came to Christ. Don't spend all your time, spend your entire life, trying to argue for your rights. You don't have any rights. You belong to Christ. The only rights that you have are ones He gives you."

And Paul understood—watch this now—he understood that it would be easy for people in both situations, whatever the circumstances, slave or free, to think that now that they've become a Christian, they are entitled to a better deal. Paul says, "Don't ever stop seeing this on a spiritual level. Remember, you're not entitled to anything."

Now listen to me. I want you to come in here real close and watch this. I know that some of you this morning, some of us in a crowd this size, are wrestling. All of us do it at different times that are trying to figure out the will of God. "God, do you want me to do this? Do you want me change this? Do you want me to change that? Does he want me to...?" Understand—general rule, okay? This in no way speaks to the fact that God does call us sometimes in situations to make some upheaval-type of things.

Listen. I mean think about it. The guy that said this—the Apostle Paul—had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16 for the sake of the gospel. Paul wrote a letter to Philemon appealing to him to free his slave named Onesimus, so he could be used for the advancement of the gospel. The guy that said, "Stay in these circumstances as a general rule," acknowledged the fact, and we've rejoiced in this congregation and still do at the number of times God is gracing us, by tapping people on the shoulder and saying, "I do want there to be this upheaval in your life. I do want you to sell everything you've got. I do want you to move your family overseas. I do want you to move to..." Those are realities. None of this speaks to that, but Paul says, "Default, general rule: Stay where you are."

And in the midst of this, he lays out these three gospel values that I believe any of us asking questions, looking for the will of God, would simply rest in these three things, and that God would show Himself strong in the midst. That wherever you are, whatever your situation is, that it's less than ideal this morning—remember grace; remember you're not going to be any more pleasing to God if you make changes, force changes, than you are right now in Christ Jesus.

And where you are, whatever your situation, pursue holiness and purity with everything you've got. That is the will of God. That is what He desires for your life. Pursue it passionately and, all along the way, make sure militantly you reject the temptation to entitlement. Reject the temptation to think that you deserve something better than you have right now. Beloved, I believe with all my heart that what Paul puts on the table here is something that would relieve a lot of anxieties and provide a lot of direction in many of our journeys.

Now, let's take that and let's back into the passage of Scripture, and let's back into marriage, back into singleness. Let's back into divorce and let's see the application that is there. Because here is where so many of the Corinthians were confused. When you stop and think about it, the confusion hasn't gone away in our contemporary culture, in marriages and families and engagements and singleness and remarriage. The confusion has not gone away with regard to what the gospel demands in those situations. But when we get the filter, when we get the lens we're supposed to look to, the rest of those things really become more simplified than we make them.

Application to Marital Status

So let's take the principle of status quo and let's see how it applies to marital status. Let's think about the application to marital status. I already called your attention to the three situations that Paul deals with. Verses 8 and 9 to those who are unmarried, verses 10 and 11 to Christians who are married, and then verses 12 through 16 when a Christian is married to a non-Christian. How does the principle of status quo apply to each one of these situations?

If you're a Christian single...

Well, here's what Paul says first: If you're a Christian single, assume that singleness is God's will as long as your body is content; assume that singleness is God's will as long as your body is content. Now, we don't have to spend a lot of time here. We referenced it last week. We simply want you to see verses 8 and 9 again by way of refresher to the unmarried and the widows. By the way, I think he mentions widows here because they are a special category of the unmarried because they have tasted marriage; they have experienced it; they know the joys of marriage. So he wants to make sure he's sensitive to that. *"To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion."* (1 Corinthians 7:8-9)

Now, if you were here last week, we acknowledged the fact that sexual desire is not the only reason for marriage—not even the top of the list. But it's on the list. And the Apostle Paul wants you, as you consider all these other things, when you as a single person are looking, asking the question like many of the singles were in that day, "Well, should I run out and get married?" We've talked about the blessing and the grace of that, when God has called you to marriage and being aggressive in that. Nothing here cancels that, counteracts it.

But Paul says, "I want you to make sure that you look at where you are physically in this." He says, "Gosh, if you can stay single, that's great. If your body is not content, you feel yourself being attracted to a person of the opposite sex in a compelling way, then let that tell you something." But he's simply saying, by way of this principle, "Don't rush out and do that without consideration of all the other factors that the Bible puts on the table, and in this context, what your body is saying to you."

Look over at verse 36. Paul fleshes this out a little bit more. *"If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed..."* That word literally means "virgin", "an unmarried individual".

...if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. (1 Corinthians 7:36-38)

Now, you see, Paul is speaking into the situation of these individuals that had come to know Christ who were single, and one of the theories of the day—it wasn't the only one—but one of the theories that came largely from the religious leaders among the Jews is that it's a sin

not to be married. "There's something wrong with you, so you need to be married." And they're looking at that, and Paul is trying to curb that.

I don't think that's much different in our day and time. Marriage is the norm. We might put it in that category. So we grow up with this tendency of thinking this is the goal and sometimes move to that too quickly when it's done based on some erroneous teaching around us. And the Apostle Paul is simply pulling in those reins and says, "That's not the norm. The norm is stay in the situation in which you were called, until God, by His ordained ways, shows you differently in that." And in this case, he is citing the body and the desires of the body as one of those determinants.

So take that filter and apply it. General rule: Stay in the situation you're in when you were saved. Appeal to God's character. God's given you assignments. Singles, listen. We're going to talk more about singleness next week, but right now, suffice it to say, you've got an assignment for this season in your life. It may not be a life's assignment, but it's your assignment right now. See it as the sovereign hand of God and know this: God is faithful in your singleness to be right there with you.

The Apostle Paul says on that journey of singleness to remember grace; remember grace. You weren't saved because you were single. You weren't saved because you were married. You were saved by grace. You're not going to please God any more if you're single. You're not going to please God any more if you're married. Don't base decisions based upon that, but right there in the midst of that, pursue holiness with everything you can. That includes your sexual purity. Pursue obedience to God. This is the mantra of your life. This is the will of God that has been laid out before you. And along the way, never succumb to the temptation to entitlement. Don't ever let Satan tempt you into thinking, "I'm entitled to be married. That's what the culture says, what my friend says, what my mom and dad say, that 'You deserve this.'" No, you don't deserve singleness; you don't deserve marriage as an entitlement. In your relationship with God, never allow your journey to degenerate to that point. Reject entitlement. What you are given is the assignment God's given you and the grace to live that out until He shows you differently.

If you're a Christian married to another Christian...

Secondly, if you're a Christian married to another Christian, assume that your marriage is God's will as long as your spouse is alive; assume your marriage is God's will as long as your spouse is alive. You see, there were Christian couples who got saved and became Christians at the same time. They were hearing all of this stuff about the perversion of the culture and the evil aspect of sexual relations and perversion and sexual relations outside of marriage and all of this stuff we talked about in 1 Corinthians 6, and they're thinking, "Could that have any place in our marriage? Could that have any place?"

Others were thinking, "You know what, I'm more serious about this gospel than my spouse is, so I'm just going to go. I'm going to go witness to people and take the gospel to the nations. It doesn't matter what my spouse is going to do." There were all of these kinds of things that were surfacing when the gospel all of a sudden impacted a marriage relationship and both individuals got saved.

So Paul speaks into that. One of the reasons we know in verse 10 that he's talking about two married people is he specifies in verses 10 and 11 up there, about a believer to a non-believer. So, now he's talking about two Christians that are married. And he says, "Here's default. Here's general rule: Stay in the situation you were in." And he brings some of the teaching of the Lord Jesus into it in verse 10. "*To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord)...*" He's simply saying Jesus really already talked about this. He says, "*...the wife*

should not separate from her husband..." and a little bit later in verse 11, at the end: *"...and the husband should not divorce his wife."* Christian couples that were entertaining the idea of divorce for whatever reason, Paul says, "No."

The only conditions in which Jesus ever allowed for divorce were when one party committed adultery, and that was a concession and not a command. It doesn't have to be that way. You can chase down some more things, more specifics related to that in that document on the website. Suffice it to say, the Apostle Paul says, "Assume your marriage is God's will. You don't have to wonder about that. You don't have to pray about that. You don't have to seek counsel about that. This is it." And this is where a general rule becomes a command in this situation because Jesus had already talked about it.

Paul also knew that he was dealing with some people that came to know Christ, but they had already divorced. Or before they got this letter, before they heard this teaching, before somebody brought them up to speed, they divorced their Christian spouse on grounds that were not the exception—unjustifiable grounds for divorce. Paul speaks, and he says right there in verse 11, *"...(but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband)..."* The Apostle Paul said, "Here is default for you. Don't remarry when you've been divorced in a Christian relationship on unjustifiable grounds."

Look down in verse 39 in the chapter. *"A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God."* (1 Corinthians 7:39-40) It's what Paul says. If your husband or wife passes away, you're free to remarry. But give singleness the old college try just to see if God's given you a new assignment at this stage in your life.

But he says to those of us who are married to Christian spouses, "You just need to assume that this is God's will," because it is. If you've been through an unjustifiable divorce as a believer, your assignment is singleness. Paul says, "This is the general rule. Don't forget God's grace. You weren't saved because you were married; you're not saved because you're single. So you're not going to bring more pleasure to Him in changing your situation, especially in a context like this where you're blatantly being disobedient." The Apostle Paul says, "In your marriage—even if it's less than ideal, even with its challenges, even with the chinks in the armor—pursue holiness. This is the will of God: That you pursue obedience to Him with everything you've got, and never along the way succumb to the temptation of thinking you are entitled to a better deal than who you've got right now."

Do you know how real that is? Do you know how the temptation is among married couples that don't have an ideal marriage and are looking at it and saying, "I don't deserve this. The gospel is better than this. Jesus ought to get more from me. I am entitled to a different marriage or to be free again and just not be single." And that temptation, beloved, drives more Christian couples to pursue divorce than just about anything. It's that feeling of entitlement. So Paul takes this principle of the status quo and says, "No. Don't do it."

If you're a Christian married to a non-Christian...

Then, there's one last one, and that is, if you're a Christian married to a non-Christian, assume marriage is God's will as long as your spouse is content; assume marriage is God's will as long as your spouse is content. Look at verse 12. *"To the rest I say (I, not the Lord)..."* That doesn't mean this is less important than what the Lord said. Paul's simply saying Jesus, to his understanding, had not addressed this subject. So under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul is giving a new directive, not a different directive. He's just building on the doctrine. *"To the rest I say...that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and*

she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him." (1 Corinthians 7:12-13) General rule—here's the default. Paul said, "Assume your marriage is God's will as long as your spouse is content.

Why? He tells us in verse 14. "*For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*" Now, mark it down. Paul is not saying that a non-Christian husband gets saved just because he's married to a Christian wife, or vice versa. That's not what he's saying. He's simply saying, "Christian spouse who's married to a non-Christian, know this: Your marriage is not immoral. In fact, the God of the universe looks at your marriage the same way He does a marriage between two people that are believers. Know this: That your children are not tainted; they are not illegitimate. They are not marred because they were born into a family where one parent was a believer and one is a non-believer."

Paul wanted his listeners to know that in the default, in the general rule, in remaining in the circumstances that they were in when they got saved, that God would honor their marriage. So he says, "Remain there." And as he says remain there, he says, "Remember, God's not surprised by your circumstances. He makes the assignment. He is sovereign over your journey. He is sovereign over your marriage to an unbeliever. So He says, 'Know that I'm faithful in the midst of that.' God's not forgotten about you. He knows exactly your address and where you are. He is faithful." This is Paul's principle: "Remain there with God. Not distant from God, not absent of God, but with God in that marriage as long as your unbelieving spouse is willing to be there with you."

And then, Paul says, "In the midst of that, remember grace. You aren't saved because you are married to a Christian husband. You won't live the Christian life better because you're getting married to a Christian husband." Remember grace. Pursue holiness in the midst of it. Let this be your agenda. Let this be your assignment in life. Let this be God's will for you. Pursue holiness, and along the way, don't ever listen to Satan's temptation to tell you that you are entitled to a better deal. Don't ever listen to Satan tell you, "Oh, you could do so much more for God if you were married to a Christian husband or a Christian wife. It wouldn't be so difficult. You could live the Christian life so much better." Don't ever succumb to the temptation to entitlement in the midst of that. God is with you. He's faithful—and listen—His grace is equally sufficient for your marriage and your parenting as it is for the couple, the two believers, that are married together.

Then, Paul says, "There is a situation that makes an exception here." Verse 15, "*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.*" The Apostle Paul says, "If your unbelieving spouse becomes discontent and decides he/she wants to divorce you and walk out, let them go." The tone of the language here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, suggests that you shouldn't even spend a lot of time fighting it; you shouldn't even spend a lot of time fighting it. Why?

Look at the last verse, verse 16. "*For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*" Do you know what Paul acknowledges is one of the temptations at that point? It's to say, "You know what? My unbelieving spouse wants to leave, but I'm going to fight this tooth and nail because I just might reach them with the gospel." Paul says this, "Evangelism is not a sufficient motive for remaining married to an unbelieving spouse who wants to depart."

Can I just say to you, if it's not a sufficient motive for remaining married, it is not a sufficient motive to get married or even to practice and prepare for marriage through dating? Evangelism—missionary dating—is not biblically correct. Missionary marriage is not biblically correct. Missionary staying married to an unbelieving spouse who wants to depart is not biblically correct. Paul says, "God's called you to peace. You don't need to lose sleep over that, although I know it breaks your heart. There's going to be my grace sufficient for healing. Don't fight that."

The principle of status quo, applied to marriage, divorce and remarriage here, but a principle that is applicable to so many journeys we find ourselves on when we come into contact with the gospel.

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