**THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF MARRIAGE**

It’s so good to be back with you this morning after being away for a couple of weeks. During our study in the Gospel of John the question was raised, “what does it mean – what does it look like practically speaking – to be a follower of Jesus Christ?” The Apostle John in his gospel effectively drives home the foundational theological truth that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, fully God and fully man, that He is the source of salvation and that we should follow Him. He’s the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep. But what does that entail? In our day to day lives how do we follow Jesus? We need some practical guidelines.

Well, First Corinthians is a wonderful book for us Christians to read and study because it provides us with guidelines for godly living. Theology has its place – it’s important that we have sound doctrine – but what we also need is to be able to apply that sound doctrine to our everyday lives, to live out the truths we learn from God’s holy and inspired word.

In First Corinthians Chaps 7-11 (this section) Paul responds to several questions that had been posed to him in previous correspondence with the Corinthian believers. Ch 7 is the answer that he gives to their questions about marriage. The Roman society they were living in was not completely unlike our own in that there were a lot of different views about marriage. The Corinthian believers lived in a morally loose society with a high divorce rate. You need to understand the Corinthian context. Two opposing ideas existed, one Roman (influence of Greek philosophy) and one Jewish. In Greek philosophy the flesh was seen as evil while the spirit was good. So those who embraced this view elevated celibacy. They viewed being celibate as being more spiritual. However, in the Jewish community, being single was not a good thing. Not at all! They emphasized that people must be married and have children. Otherwise they would be disobedient to God’s command in Genesis 1:28 to “be fruitful and multiply.” Both of these ideas, Roman and Jewish, made their way into the early church as both Gentiles and Jews came to Christ. And so there was a great deal of confusion about marriage and singleness among these new believers.

What Paul does in this chapter is to teach the sanctity of marriage and to present the view of marriage from God’s perspective.

To be married or not to be married, that is the question, as we begin 1 Corinthians Ch 7.

READ 1 Corinthians 7:1

There is absolutely nothing wrong with remaining celibate if that is what one chooses to do. Paul states that it is “good.” There is absolutely nothing wrong with not being married. In fact, as you read further on in this chapter, Paul actually favors a celibate lifestyle over being married and he gives his reasons. However, it is also good to be married…

READ 1 Corinthians 7:2

If a person is tempted sexually then – news flash – they don’t have the gift of celibacy. In this case it is better for them to be married. This is the norm for most people today and in Paul’s day and Paul recognizes it. Notice Paul’s emphasis of sexual relations occurring between husband and wife. Two things to note:

(1) Sex is acceptable only in a marriage relationship;

(2) Marriage is monogamous (one wife, one husband).

This teaching flies in the face of our society which promotes living together (try it out first and see if you like it and are compatible, then get married). It also contradicts the gay agenda which seeks to expand marriage to include unions between people of the same sex. As Christians, we have a choice to make. Do we believe and hold to the teachings of God’s holy word? Or do we throw it out, say it is irrelevant and go along with voices of the majority in our society? Top line – do things God’s way or Bottom line – believe the lies of Satan which will always contradict God’s word.

Paul’s next point (spends 3 verses addressing this) is that celibacy is wrong for married people…

READ 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

In v 3 the NASB says, “Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.” The ESV says “conjugal rights.” What is this “duty” or “conjugal right”? In context with V 2 this is referring to sex. The husband’s body belongs to his wife and the wife’s body to her husband. Depriving your spouse of sex is not good because it could contribute to a partner seeking sexual fulfillment outside of the marriage (Satan’s temptation). Short periods of abstinence to devote one’s self to prayer may be called for at times, but not long periods. And even that needs to be agreed upon by both parties. Paul emphasizes being sensitive to your mate’s needs, which includes their God-given need for sex.

READ 1 Corinthians 7:6-7

Paul states his own personal opinion here. He does not command or advocate singleness or marriage over the other. His personal preference is that a life of singleness is better than a life of marriage. However, Paul knows that not everyone has the gift of celibacy. “As I myself am” means not only was Paul single, but God had given him the ability to live the single life without distracting sexual temptations.

From verse 8 thru 16 Paul gives specific guidelines about marriage to 4 specific groups. Every person in this room falls into one of these 4 groups. Group 1 is the unmarried and widows…

READ 1 Corinthians 7:8-9

If you are single it is a good thing to remain single. However, if you have no self-control – if you are tempted sexually (“burn with passion”) – it is better to marry. If this is not an area of temptation for you, it is good for you to remain single. At the time Paul wrote these words he was obviously a single man. Whether he was ever married or not has been widely debated, but nobody is for certain. Most scholars believe that he had been married at one time and perhaps his wife had died. But that is pure conjecture.

Group 2 is the married individuals who are married to believers…

READ 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

Two Christians are married to each other. Paul teaches that they should not divorce and that their marriage should be permanent. This agrees with Jesus’ teaching in Mark 10:1-12. If one does, however, decide to divorce their spouse, they are to remain unmarried or be reconciled to their original mate. Paul does not mention any exceptions to this rule, but there is one exception that Jesus mentions twice, once in Matthew 5:32 and again in Matthew 19:9 – “sexual immorality.” In other words, unfaithfulness in the marriage. But except for that, two Christians are to stay married to each other.

Group 3 are those married to an unbelieving spouse who wishes to remain in the marriage…

READ 1 Corinthians 7:12-14

So you have a believer married to an unbeliever. This was quite common during the early years of Christianity. Often one spouse would get converted to Christianity while the other clung firmly to their pagan ways. In these situations, Paul makes it clear that the Christian partner should never initiate the separation. His reason? With the Christian partner present, their home has a godly influence in it that it would not have otherwise. The Christian (v 14 “makes holy,” the NASB says “is sanctified”). In other words the believing spouse can influence both the unbelieving spouse and the children. There is a godly presence in the home that can bless that home. So Paul says if you are a believer in that situation, stay in the marriage. You just never know the impact your life witness will have on those around you. People around you notice more about you than you think they do.

Group 4 is a married believer whose partner is an unbeliever who wants out of the marriage. They opt to leave…

READ 1 Corinthians 7:15-16

A Christian should not resist their unbelieving partners decision to leave. Some might say, “well, I want to be an influence on them to bring them to Christ.” But Paul says here that if they aren’t interested and want to leave then there is no reason to try and hold together such a marriage. For the sake of peace, Paul says, let them go. Pray for them and let the Holy Spirit do a work in their life. By the way in such cases the believing spouse is free to remarry.

So what’s the application for us from all of this? Whatever God has given you as your marital state, accept it as His will, and maximize it for His glory. If He has chosen to make you single, that’s good. If He’s chosen that you be married, that’s good too. If you are married to an unbeliever who wants to stay in the marriage, that’s good. If married to an unbeliever who wants out and they leave, that’s good, because you are free, and maybe God has another for you. Whatever your circumstances, be content and trust God for your future. Let Him have His way in your life. Let Him mold you and make you into the person who honors and glorifies Him.

“Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way”