Text: I Corinthians 7:8-16
Title: "Marriage Matters…What Does God Think About Divorce?" Pt.2

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – Can you imagine with me a narrow, winding road snaking its way through the countryside? On this road there is a bridge over a deep ravine and at the bottom, a raging river. But the bridge is positioned precariously on a blind curve. A great storm comes, and the bridge is washed out by high waters, but people who are driving along the road have no idea. The first few cars that make the curve suddenly are faced with catastrophic consequences. Having no time to stop or elude the danger they plunge over the ravine and into the raging waters below. Car after car experiences the same horrifying fate. By God's grace you are on the same road and as you round the turn and see the horrific scene ahead, you somehow manage to stop your car before plunging over the edge.

> Immediately you hear the cries from the river below where the cars ahead of you were not as fortunate. You are torn between two tasks: one is to try to help those who have gone over the edge and need to be rescued … the other is to somehow warn the oncoming traffic of the great danger that is before them. So for the next hour, you find yourself racing between the river below, helping the hurting victims, and to the road above, cautioning those coming around the curve to be careful.
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> In many ways this is the dilemma the church faces when it comes to marriage and divorce. We are all too aware that a terrible thing has happened to so many families who have experienced divorce. Maybe you find yourself still in the icy waters of that horrible event and you're fighting like crazy to keep your head above the water. There are times when you think you are going down for the last time. Maybe you messed up and the broken marriage is your fault. Or maybe you did everything in your power and you couldn't stop it from happening. But whatever the case you're fighting for your life in the swirling circumstances you are in. And Jesus and His church are here to help rescue the hurting victims of divorce. If that's where you are, or where you've been, you need to know that we're here for each other.
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> But then we realize that there are more and more people coming over the edge … more people hurting from broken families. Somehow we've got to get the bridge repaired. We've got to put some guardrails up on the road to keep marriages from going over the edge and ending in divorce. The best way I know to do that is to teach what God's word says about marriage and about divorce. We need to equip marriages to be strong through all the seasons of life.

So the church has to take a two-fold approach:

- We <u>help out</u> the hurting victims of divorce.
- We continue to <u>hold up</u> the enduring standards of marriage.

Open your Bibles again to I Corinthians 7. This is one of the most thorough teachings in all the Bible about marriage matters … and single matters. It talks about single adults who are divorced, widowed, or never-married. It talks about marriages where both partners are believers, and marriages where only one partner is a Christian. It talks about fighting to keep a marriage together,

and what to do if your mate divorces you. It talks about when remarriages is appropriate, and when it is not. It talks about how to stay happily married, and how to be happy unmarried.

Now the Bible tells us clearly what God thinks about divorce. In Malachi 2 God says, "I hate divorce." Why? Well I Corinthians 7:10-16 tells us two reasons:

Last week we talked about the first one…

1. BECAUSE OF THE <u>COMMANDS</u> OF SCRIPTURE

You'll find commands throughout the Old and New Testaments related the sanctity and permanence of the marriage relationship. We see it in the Law, in the Prophets, in the teachings of Jesus, and here in our text in I Corinthians 7.

Now these commands needed to be spoken into the Roman culture of the NT times. In Corinth, for instance, an atmosphere of sexual promiscuity was pervasive, as we have seen in our study of I Corinthians. But the whole marriage thing was messed up big time, as well. There were all sorts of marriage arrangements that were popular in those days depending on the circumstances.

> Today we know a little about that. Just stop to think about the various "arrangements," if you will. Of course, there is the <u>traditional marriage</u> that the Bible endorses and upholds. Then you have what is known as <u>common law marriage</u> where a man and a woman live together in a marital status without legal action. In some states living together a specified period of time constitutes a legal marriage. And then you have in some states <u>gay marriage</u> or at least civil unions between homosexuals. And then you have <u>cohabitation</u> where people just live together, not wanting to get married. And that, incidentally, is a growing number in the US.

In the days of the NT, it wasn't uncommon for a person to marry and divorce 20, maybe 30 times. Note: Now stop to think about how Christians were affected by all of this confusion.

So commands are give to two categories of marriages that existed in the church:

- I Corinthians 7:10-11 – Where the marriage involves two believers, they must remain married.
- I Corinthians 7:12-13 – Where one person in the marriage is a believer and one is an unbeliever. Maybe one of them became a believer. What then? Or maybe a believer went against the teaching of the apostle and married an unbeliever? As far as the believer goes, if the unbeliever is willing to remain in the marriage, then the believer should not divorce.

I said last week that Paul is talking about a marriage in which persons have the most incompatibility you could imagine … the most potential for conflict. Why? You're talking here about people who are as different as light and dark, literally. A believer is living in the light; the unbeliever is in the darkness. The believer is alive in Christ; the unbeliever is dead in their sins.

> And even with all those incompatibilities, Paul says to the believer, "As far as it depends on your actions, stay in the marriage. Work hard to keep your marriage together.

So the command is that for the Christian mate, stay in the marriage … don't divorce. Now there are a couple of exceptions to this command we'll talk about later.

Now there's another reason why God hates divorce …

2. BECAUSE OF THE <u>CONSEQUENCES</u> OF OUR DECISIONS (vv.14-16)

And that's what the Scriptures address beginning in v.14. And Paul will give some positive consequences for remaining in the marriage relationship. But before we get to that, I want to remind us of …

The <u>negative</u> consequences of getting <u>divorced</u>

- **Crippling <u>guilt</u>** – This guilt, for the child of God, comes from the knowledge that you have sinned against God (unless of course it falls into the category of the exceptions). And most Christians I know who have been through a divorce, no matter what the circumstances, struggle with guilt for many years to come.

  Listen carefully. Divorce and adultery is sin, but it is not the unpardonable sin. If that has happened in your life, you can go to God for forgiveness and pardon. And under the blood of Jesus Christ, your sin is forgiven. But that doesn't eliminate the far-reaching consequences that include…

- **Devastating <u>feelings</u>** – There will be long-term feelings of regret. Depression is common. A low sense of self-worth comes over the lives of those who have gone through divorce. Add to that unresolved anger, unforgiveness and bitterness over a nasty divorce.

- **Confused <u>relationships</u>** - Just about every relationship is changed in some way. Just about every relationship is complicated by divorce. And when remarriage happens, these confused relationships just multiply more.

- **Strained <u>finances</u>** – Did you know that divorce is one of the primary causes of poverty in America? While you are probably making some lawyer rich, most divorces result in tremendous financial set backs for the husband and the wife … and for the children. And that's the next negative consequence of divorce.

- **Lifelong effects on the <u>children</u>**

  Now I can go into great detail here. But I thought it would be helpful to you to hear it straight from a child of divorce. Deanna Kiser is with me this morning. Deanna and her husband Roy are active members of our church. But Deanna, to this day, deals with something that happened 18 years ago.

  INTERVIEW: (1) Deanna, tell us what happened to your family 18 years ago. (2) What were the deepest hurts that came into your life as a result of your parents getting a divorce? (3) How have you learned to trust God through this experience? (4) I understand that one thing

that is common among children of divorce is that they feel guilty because they think they caused the divorce. Is that true?

Now let's get back to the text. Because not only are there negative consequences to divorce, there are also …

The <u>positive</u> consequences of remaining <u>married</u>

The reason a married person should not walk out of a marriage is because there is an influence that the believer exerts …

- **On your <u>mate</u> (vv.14a,16)**

  1 Corinthians 7:14a (NIV) - For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.

  Notice the word "sanctified" here. It means to be made holy … set apart … and in the biblical sense, set apart for God.

  Now some of you are in marriages like Paul describes here … you are saved, but your mate isn't.

  Scholars have debated this forever. But there is a sense in which, if you have an unbelieving mate and you are willing to be faithful to that marriage covenant, if they are willing to stay in that marriage (you choose not to divorce them), you are pulling that unbelieving mate into the circle of holiness. Can you imagine a greater influence on a lost person than to have a holy person, a saint, a Christian living in the home, representing the presence and the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ? It's as if the unbelieving mate has lived with Jesus because they are living with a holy mate.

  Paul says, "Just think of the possibilities…"

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

  Again, remember that Paul is talking about the most incompatible man and woman you could ever imagine … one a believer, one a non-believer. If a marriage like that is worth fighting for, how much more a marriage with lesser conflicts?

  Of course, no one is saved by the faith of someone else, however.

  Even if both of you are believers, one of you is spiritually stronger than the other. One of you has to have enough faith, hope and love for the two of you. Who knows what can happen? Faithfulness to your marriage vow can have eternal consequences.

Do you care more about your convenience and your comfort and your happiness in that marriage, or about the possible eternal destiny of that mate? Your holiness can have an impact on the lives of those you love.

But Paul goes on to show another positive consequence …

- **On your <u>children</u> (v.14b)**

  1 Corinthians 7:14b (NIV) - Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

  What does that mean? I think Paul is saying that the holy influence of a believing mom or dad pulls children into a circle of holiness that will benefit that child. In a family where even just one of the parents is a believer, blessings come to the children that are unbelievable. They have a better chance of coming to Christ. They have a better chance of having a solid moral and spiritual foundation in their life. They have a better chance of enjoying the covenant promises of God.

Some of you may be asking, "So you're saying that I should stay in a miserable relationship just for the children?" Well … yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. If you ignore all the other reasons to stay in the marriage, don't ignore this one.

QUESTION: What do you do when all you do doesn't work (v.15)?

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

I interpret this to mean that Christian man or woman, if you've done all you can do, and the unbeliever walks out of the marriage, you are not bound to that marriage any longer; you may remarry in God's will.

Matthew 19 includes another exception. When there is marital unfaithfulness, you may (not must) be released from that marriage covenant.

As I understand the Scriptures, those are the two legitimate reasons for divorce and remarriage for a believer.

CONCLUSION

Now many of you here today are looking back on your life, and there has been a divorce, maybe more than one. As you look at your circumstances, maybe you were the unfaithful one. Perhaps there were no biblical grounds for the divorce, and you have since remarried. What about you?

Listen carefully. You, of all people, can understand what happened that day when some religious leaders dragged an adulterous woman into the presence of Jesus. You of all people can understand

the scorn and the disgrace that comes when everyone knows what's happened. And you of all people can feel the freedom that the woman must have felt when she heard the words of Jesus:

John 8:11 (NIV) -"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."