Text: I Corinthians 7:8-16
Title: "Marriage Matters … What Does God Think About Divorce?" Pt.1

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – Star-Telegram front page: "Together Forever."

ILLUSTRATION – A recent issue of Newsweek magazine asked the question: "Is there anyone left in the land who has not heard a friend, a child, or a parent describe the agony of divorce?" The answer is quite simply "no!"

Turn with me once again to I Corinthians 7. God doesn't want us making up our own rules about marriages and family. He designed it and built it, and it runs best when we operate our families according to the instruction manual, God's Holy Word.

> Review - Sexual immorality was so rampant in Corinth that the very name of Corinth was slang for sexual immorality. Someone who just threw off all restraint and lived such a promiscuous lifestyle was said to "Corinthianize."
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> Keep that in mind. Because there were some very sincere believers who were beginning to wonder, should sex have any place in a Christian's life, even in marriage? As a matter of fact, the words in v.1, "It is good for a man not to marry," may have been the words of some Corinthian teacher advocating celibacy for all Christians.
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> What Paul will say is, "That's OK if you have the gift of singleness, if God calls you to that lifestyle." But not everyone has that calling
> But then there may have been others in the church who thought it best just to get out of marriage altogether.

Read text. Here, as in other parts of the Bible God tells us what he thinks about marriage and about the breaking up of marriages.

God could not have been any clearer than when He said, "I hate divorce…" (Malachi 2:16). Why does God speak so forcefully against this practice?

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

I think it would be way cool if by some strange twist of circumstances that Dr. Phil could assemble on his show a panel of experts, not from the world, but from God's Word to speak on the matter of marriage. Let's ask each of them what the Spirit of God revealed to them about the institution of marriage.

- **<u>Moses</u> (Genesis 1-2; Exodus 20)**

  Genesis 1:27 (NIV) - So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 2:21-24 (NIV) - So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. [22] Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. [23] The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." [24] For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The words "be united" mean to have a bond that cannot be broken.

God took Moses up on Mt. Sinai and gave Moses by His own hand the Ten Commandments. Two of the those commands relate to our discussion:

Exodus 20:14 (NIV) - "You shall not commit adultery.

Adultery has to with a sexual relationship outside of the marriage union. So when a married person has a relationship with someone other than his or her partner, that is adultery. God said, 'Never violate marriage this way.'

Exodus 20:17 (NIV) - "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Not only is it wrong to commit adultery, it is wrong to desire to do so.

You see, marriage is so sacred, so much a separation of two people unto each other, so much a work of God, that any violation of it in body or in mind, is to violate the command of God. In the OT the law was that when a person violated marriage in body, he was to be executed on the spot. That's how sacred marriage is in the eyes of God.

- **<u>Malachi</u> (Malachi 2:13-16)**

Seated next to Moses is a little known Jewish prophet by the name of Malachi. His prophecy is the contained in the last book of the OT. What would Malachi have to contribute to our distinguished panel discussion here? Malachi might say something like this.

"God spoke to me at a time when the people of God were in a real mess. They had returned to their homeland after their exile in Babylon, but they had lost their passion for the Lord and repeatedly questioned His love.

"God rebuked His people through me and said…

Malachi 2:13-16 (NIV) - Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. [14] You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her,

though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. [15] Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. [16] "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

- **<u>Jesus Christ</u> (Matthew 5, 19)**

Now at this point all eyes turn to the One seated in the middle of the lineup of experts. Everyone knows He possesses an authority that is superior to all the others. It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There's a hush that comes across the room as He speaks:

"You ask questions today about marriage and divorce, and it was that way when I walked this earth. In fact one day I had some religious leaders come to me and ask me what I thought about the common practice of men divorcing their wives. I knew it was a trick question because there was a very popular rabbi at the time, Rabbi Hillel, who was quoted often as saying that men were perfectly free to divorce their wives for anything … if she burned his breakfast, put too much salt on his food, showed disrespect to him, spoke disrespectfully of her husband's parents in his presence, spoke to a man on the street, or even let her hair down in public, he could divorce her. That view was the most popular in the days of the NT.

But I answered them, not with an answer on divorce, but with My Father's will about marriage from the beginning:

Matthew 19:4-6 (NIV) – "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. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

"It's all so very clear from the beginning. But then someone stood up in the crowd and asked about Moses demanding that a husband give his wife a certificate of divorce when he sent her away. What about that?

"I looked them squarely in their faces and said, "No. It was only because of the hardness of hearts that Moses permitted that. Men were divorcing their wives for the pettiest of offenses. Most of the time the wife had not been unfaithful; the husband just didn't want her around anymore. So Moses demanded a certificate of divorce be given to state the grounds of the divorce to protect the woman's reputation.

"But understand this: The Father never intended this to be a license to freely divorce your wives. Then I said to them …

Matthew 19:9 (NIV) - I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

With that the Lord Jesus sat back in His seat. Then an aged man, who has been silent to this point, straightens himself and leans forward to introduce himself.

- **<u>Paul</u> (I Corinthians 7:10-13)**

So now we come back to our text where we began. So turn again with me to I Corinthians 7.

Now in the church in Corinth there were several categories of people who had a great interest in this discussion. And I thank God for the timeliness of His Word because the same categories exist today:

Categories of single persons:

- "Unmarried" (divorced)
- "Widows" (death of spouse)

1 Corinthians 7:8-9 (NIV) - Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. [9] But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

- "Virgins" (never before married, celebate) – mentioned in v.25

Categories of married persons:

- **Married (believers who are married)**

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (NIV) - To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): <u>A wife must not separate from her husband</u>. [11] But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And <u>a husband must not divorce his wife</u>.

"Not I, but the Lord" refers to what the Lord Jesus Christ had already spoken about marriage in the Gospels.

- **"The rest…" (believers married to unbelievers)**

1 Corinthians 7:12-13 (NIV) - 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, <u>he must not divorce her</u>. [13] And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, <u>she must not divorce him</u>.

"I, not the Lord" … what does that mean. Well, it means that Paul is speaking on a matter that Jesus had not specifically addressed in the Gospels. Now as an apostle of Jesus He would speak with the full weight of the authority given him by Jesus.

Now listen very carefully here. Paul is talking about marriage under the most difficult circumstances imaginable … marriage under the most potential conflict imaginable … marriage with the greatest incompatibility imaginable … marriage with the most complications imaginable … marriage with

the most potentially insurmountable problems … marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, between a person indwelt by the Spirit of Almighty God and a person indwelt by the spirit of this age … the difference between light and darkness. In another place Paul tells believers not to marry unbelievers. But once it happens that a Christian person winds up being married to a non-Christian, then Paul says now you are bound to do everything in your power to stay in that marriage.

> So in my thinking the arguments that Paul is making here for not divorcing are being applied to a case where it would appear that the marriage was D.O.A. … to a marriage that doesn't have a chance of surviving because the two parties have the greatest difference that can exist between human beings … the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. So if this kind of marriage deserves to be fought for, then every other marriage with lesser issues deserves to be fought for.
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> If marriage is worth fighting for under these grounds, it is worth fighting for on all grounds.

So you see repeatedly in the Scriptures there are commands about marriage that we must honor. Next week I will talk about another reason God hates divorce is because of the CONSEQUENCES.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION - Author and business leader Fred Smith writes in Leadership Journal: One of my treasured memories comes from a doughnut shop in Grand Saline, Texas. There was a young farm couple sitting at the table next to mine. He was wearing overalls and she a gingham dress. After finishing their doughnuts, he got up to pay the bill, and I noticed she didn't get up to follow him. But then he came back and stood in front of her.

> She put her arms around his neck, and he lifted her up, revealing that she was wearing a full-body brace. He lifted her out of her chair and backed out the front door to the pickup truck, with her hanging from his neck. As he gently put her into the truck, everyone in the shop watched. No one said anything until a waitress remarked, almost reverently, "He took his vows seriously."