

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

Rethink Marriage Pt 3

Rethink Vow Violation

1 Corinthians 7:8-24

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 11.13-14.10

We're in 1 Corinthians, chapter 7, verses 8 through 24 this morning. We're going to look at a topic that for many of you is difficult. It's just a difficult topic. It is painful. There's a sense of failure attached to this. Also, there's an awful lot of questions. Many times I've come to realize that even though those who have been involved with the Lord and have been studying for years don't have all of the right perception when it comes to divorce. And so we're going to talk about divorce and remarriage this morning. Divorce has often been called the slow death of marriage. In fact, one person said if marriage means you fell in love divorce means you climbed out of love. It's not something that is easy by any means.

But marriage problems are not unique to our contemporary culture. You do a study in history you find that there were divorce issues written into the Code of Hammurabi. It was back in 1760 B.C. When language was first codified, we're talking about early civilization, there was talk about divorce. You look into the laws of the Athenians and the Romans and you find out that they had laws. They had edicts that were related to marriage relationships and divorce. In fact, they had a saying that essentially that as Romans marriage ought to be free. That might help us to understand why they were married and divorced so many times. We talked last week that we understand that it's somewhat common in our culture for people to maybe be married and divorced once, or maybe twice but in the Roman culture it was very common for them to be married upward to twenty times; divorced twenty times. That was just a part of their culture and they believed that marriage ought to be free. They could just come and go. This was the culture that the Corinthians were involved with and they were writing Paul and they were asking questions about their relationship in marriage. Are they free to divorce? Are they free to remarry? Paul writes them back and he helps them to understand the biblical instructions on divorce and remarriage.

He's going to do this by classifying three groups of people. And each group is important to have us have a full understanding of the issue. We're going to learn about one category – people called widows. Another one – married but we might classify them as married with problems. And then the third married to unbelievers. Those are the three categories that we're going to work through the text and help us understand this issue of divorces and remarriage.

Let's get started. Let's look at the first category. The category of widows comes up in verse 8 and 9. Paul writes, to the unmarried and the widowed. Now we have to stop even before we get into it because he uses two words, really to designate one category and you might misunderstand that at first, but he's using this to include both men and women who have lost their spouse to death. We know this because of the way the words are written. The word unmarried is really the masculine gender. Words in the Greek can masculine, feminine or neuter. It helps with the syntax; helps with the morphology of understanding of how words fit together. And Paul is saying to the men who have lost their spouse. Then the word widow is in the feminine case. So, he's saying to the women who have lost their husbands due to death. He's bringing them both together into one category. Why is that? Well, because in the

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biblical times a widow, especially a widowed woman was a special class of citizen to the church. The church would assist them financially. They would have special ministry. That was primarily because of the culture. The culture actually had a low view of women who were widowed. They could no longer take care of themselves. Someone else would have to financially take care of them. That was the job of their husbands; of their family. They now became a burden in a sense to society. That's why when you read the Gospels, it's interesting to look into the heart of Jesus. The two groups of people that Jesus were most concerned about and wanted cared for were those that were widows and orphans. It's because they basically had been discarded by society. Paul wants to make sure that the Corinthians understood that these two people, both the men and the women would fit into this same category because he has one piece of advice for them.

Now, notice the text. To the unmarried and to the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. Obviously Paul was single. We know at one time he was married and he was a Pharisee and under Jewish law he was required to be married. What happened to his wife? We don't know. We don't know if she died. We don't know if she left him because of his conversion to Christianity. We don't have that data but we do know that at this point he was considered either unmarried, widowed. He was at least saying you need to be as I am. Well, what was Paul? Well, if say he was a widow then what was he? He was an active widow. He was an active, unmarried man in the ministry and that's key. He was saying God has given me a special place. Since I've lost my wife I now pour all of my attention into ministry. And he's saying this is what I want you to do.

But now he continues off of this and he says in verse 9, but if they can not exercise self control, he's talking about sexual self control, they should marry for it is better to marry than to be aflamed with passion. What is he saying? He's saying it's not biblically wrong for a widowed man or a widowed woman to be remarried. Why is that? Because at the point of death the marriage bond is broken. That marriage covenant is over. If your spouse dies you are now free to remarry without any ramifications. It's not as if you're committing adultery. It's not as if there is some kind immoral association with it. No. It's completely fine and appropriate biblically. And I set that up just to set the tone of the first category. So, it's not considered inappropriate for someone who's widowed to be remarried.

Now, we go into the next category and we get a little bit deeper. In fact, we go a little bit technical so you need to hold on. You need to follow me closely. We're talking about married people. Paul is talking to a group of people that we might say we're having some difficulties or some issues. In fact, there's a sense in the text that he's speaking to someone specifically. Remember, the Corinthians wrote Paul concerning what was going on in their culture and in their church and it's as if he is answering a specific question; as if there was a particular woman in the congregation who was in the process of divorcing her husband and they wanted counsel about this. And so Paul gives this beginning in verse 10.

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He says, to the married I give this charge – not I but the Lord. Hold on to that. We're going to come back to that phrase in a moment. The wife should not separate from her husband but if she does she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband and the husband should not divorce his wife.

Let's go back to that phrase. What is this phrase when he says I give you this charge – not I but the Lord. He says something similar. Let your eyes glance to verse 12. He says, to the rest I say, I not the Lord. What is he saying with these change sense of parenthesis in the middle of the text. Some people look into this and they say, you know what? Paul is saying here this is just my opinion. It shouldn't be considered scripture. It's just what I think. There are some things the Lord says that's scripture but what I'm saying here you don't have to worry about that. This is one of the great misconceptions of scriptures. Another reason why I hate red letter bibles. Red letter bibles are bibles that have, in the Gospels all the words in Jesus printed in red. People will gravitate to those and say well, this is scripture. This is the only scripture I trust because they're the words of Jesus. That's not accurate. That's not the case.

We learned from 2 Timothy that all of scripture is God breathed. What you have in your hand is accurate. What Paul was saying here when he says I give this charge "not I but the Lord" he's referring to a teaching that Jesus taught on divorce. He's essentially referring to what has already been known as taught by the Lord. In verse 12 when he goes on he's saying Jesus doesn't say anything about this. This is new revelation. Let me give you clarity. And so, really verses 10 and 11 is just a recap of what Jesus already talked about; what He already taught and that's what Paul's doing - making clarification.

So what did Jesus talk about? What did He teach when it comes to divorce? Well, for that you need to hold you place in 1 Corinthians; come over to the Gospels. Let's start in the book of Mark. We'll go backwards. We'll go from Mark to Matthew. Mark chapter 10. We'll read what Jesus has to say about this particular issue. Actually, Jesus is involved in a conversation with the Pharisees. The Pharisees are trying to trap him in his theology. But he just talked very plainly, very clearly and he reverts to the Old Testament and you're going to see some of these passages that look familiar.

Let's start in verse 6. He says, Mark chapter 10, verse 6, but from the beginning of creation God made men, men and female. Therefore man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh. That sounds familiar because that's out of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. We looked at that last week. So, Jesus is reverting to the original covenant with Adam. And notice what He says. He says, and they shall become one flesh, so they are no longer two but one. He's talking about the covenant relationship of marriage; that when a man and a wife come together it is not just a spiritual union. It's not just a

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psychological union but it's also a physical union. We understand that. We talked about that. But that physical union represents a spiritual union because look, who is it that brings them together? Verse 9. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate. Do you hear that? Who is it that brings the man and the woman together? God, right? Now, no man should separate them.

Now, the Disciples have questions. Like us, we would have questions if we were spending time with Jesus and we see that in verse 10. They go off. They begin to ask him questions. What question would you ask him if you had the opportunity? I think probably the same questions that the Disciples had. You'd probably say to Jesus, well, alright, what happens if someone goes ahead and gets a divorce? What do you do then? What's the consequences then? We pick that up in verse 11. Jesus says to them, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery. Now, there is one caveat in scripture. There's one exception. That's found in Matthew chapter 5 so let's turn there. Matthew 5.

Matthew 5, 32. Again, Jesus is speaking about divorce. This is now another situation. He's actually preaching on the Sermon on the Mount. The issue of divorce comes around. He says in verse 32 but I say to you everyone who divorces his wife except, here's the exception clause in scripture, except on the grounds of sexual immorality makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Now, remember, we're trying to be technical. We're trying to understand what the bible has to say on this issue of divorce and remarriage. So, what do we know so far? Well, the biblical standard for marriage is ever lasting. Why is that? Because God has joined the man and the woman together and made a covenant relationship. No one should separate that. The only exception is if your partner would commit a sexual, immoral act and that is called adultery and now that releases you from that marriage agreement; from that covenant agreement.

But what if she goes on or what if he goes on and divorces even if you know this? Even if you know the biblical ramifications? That's what Paul talks about next. Why? Because Paul lived in the real world. He give this very clear biblical sense and then he says but what if she, now look at this, go back with me, verse 11 – but what if she does? He says what if she goes on with the divorce? She should, and he gives two more clarifications; she should remained unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband and the husband should not divorce his wife. What is the biblical standard when it comes to divorce? That is if you are divorced and you decided to move forward with the divorce you're only point of change from that point forward is to remain unmarried or to reconcile. Why? Because in God's eyes you're still married unless you or your spouse committed adultery. Then the bond is broken. Again, very technical aspect of scripture.

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We're going to come back and deal with the technical side in a moment but I want to keep moving through the text because we have a third category that enlightens us even more. The third category is to those who are married to unbelievers. So, we've looked at the widows. We've looked at the married – those with problems. Now, we're looking at the married to unbelievers.

Now, this category has to do with the issue of mixed marriage and you'll see this in verses 12 through 13. He says, to the rest I say, I not the Lord, that if any brother, now notice that, has a wife who is an unbeliever. He is making a contrast between those who are believers and unbelievers. Now, in that he's going to set up two case scenarios. Follow me, alright? The first case scenario is with the believer who is married to an unbeliever but the unbeliever does not want to dissolve the marriage. Watch what happens. To the rest, I say, I not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife 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. Do you hear what is going on here? He is essentially saying that if you are a believer and you are married to an unbeliever don't make the issue of your faith the issue that would cause a divorce. In other words, the believer is not to seek a divorce to remarry a believer. Does that make sense? Do not break up your marriage simply because you are not on the same plain spiritually. You might be unequally yoked spiritually but that is not grounds for a divorce. Why? Look at 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.

You say what? How can this be the case? Is the scripture saying if an unbeliever is married to a believer God sees them as redeemed and as holy? No. That's not what scripture is saying. Every person, every individual person is accountable with their life to the Lord. That's an individual issue. Marriage does not save you. What this is called is matrimonial sanctification. It's a term that helps us understand the root meaning of this word. The base meaning of the Greek word, **ἀγιάζω agioso is to be made holy**, just like in the text. But we also understand it as to be sanctified. We talk about sanctification here. Sanctification means to grow in spiritual development; spiritual maturity. But it also has a very broad sense of view of sanctification that the residual impact of being around a believer is passed on to unbelievers.

Let me explain it this way. If you're a believer you are given certain blessings by the Lord simply because you're following after the Lord. We understand that. If you're in a home situation where there are people who are not believers, maybe your spouse or your children they are the residual beneficiaries of your blessings. It might be something befalling you or God might be taking care of you in a special way but it's also moving out in that concentric rings to the rest of the family. And so, what's going on here in the text is

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God is saying that essentially you're unbelieving spouse is getting the effects or getting the impact, the residual benefits of your belief. And not only that – you might be the catalyst to help lead them to faith. So, don't make your issue of a different belief systems the issue of divorce. Don't do that. You're not allowed to be divorced.

But then he sets up a second case scenario and this case scenario is that a married person is married to an unbeliever who wants to get divorced. What do you do then? Now we're at verse 15. He says but, if the unbelieving partner separates let it be so. Let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. He says, for the sake of peace, if you're unbelieving spouse wants to leave you – let them go. By the way, you're not longer bound to them in that covenant relationship. Why is that? Because your unbelieving spouse is the one that is doing the separating.

John Calvin says it this way. The unbelieving spouse has made a breach with God rather than with his or her partner. The word enslaved is the word bound and it's used in the negative sense. So under these circumstances the believer is not bound. The believer is now free to remarry without any guilt of adultery.

Do you see what the text is saying? That over and over again God is saying I want you to stay in the situation where you're at. If you're a widower I have plans for you. If you're married, stay married. If you're married to an unbeliever, unless they leave stay in the condition that you are. In fact, that's what Paul says in verses 17 through 24 and he does it through a number of different images. He does it through the images of circumcision and slavery and he says it over and over again remain in the condition you were called. In fact, he says it three times. Look at the text. He says, only let, verse 17 each person lead the wife that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all of 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 un-circumcision but keep the commands of God. Verse 20 is saying each one should remain in the condition which he was called.

Not only that but he picks up and talks about slavery. He says, were you a slave when you were called? In other words – called to faith. Do not be concerned about it but if you can gain your freedom avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who is called in the Lord as a slave is a free man of the Lord. Likewise, he who is free when he was called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price. Do not become slaves of men. He says the exact same thing again. So brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there, let him remain with God. He's using this as a prototype and he's forcing it back into the three categories. Do you see that? He's saying, if you're a widow, remain that way. God has something for you. If you're married, remain that way even if you're having problems – remain that way. Work

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through it. God has something for you. If you're married to an unbeliever you don't know the future – remain that way unless they leave. Remain that way. Why? Because that's how God can use you best. Don't try to change your circumstances. Live within your circumstances but watch this. Live by the power of God. That's why we don't seek to change our circumstances; get out of them; run from them; be free from them or rather go to God and say will you give me the power to live within this situation. As I realize that's what you've called me to.

You're saying, what if I did. What if I did change my circumstance? Well, we've already seen the technical data of scripture. We've already seen that if you're a widow and you're married you're not breaking any biblical commandments. That if you're married and you're seeking a divorce the only exception is if your spouse commits adultery. That if you're married to an unbeliever you should remain married unless the unbeliever leaves. You say but what if my life was outside of that? What do I do now? How does God see me now?

The last thing I want to do is minimize the Word of God. God's very clear about His feelings about divorce. In fact, in Malachi chapter 2, verse 16 the prophet quotes God directly – for I hate divorce says the Lord, the God of Israel. That's pretty strong language. What do we know about God? What do we know? What do we know about Him in totality? That He's a gracious God; a forgiving God. In fact, Jeremiah, writing the Lamentations says, my soul continually remembers it. What's it? Well, for our cases put divorce there. You can put anything but this is something specific to Jeremiah but let's put divorce there in our case. My soul continually remembers my divorce and has bowed down within me. This I call to mind and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul, therefore, I will hope in Him.

Why do we have hope in the Lord? Because He bought us in grace. He sustains us in grace. Do you understand that? Do you think he forgave you once at the cross and then that was it? No, when He calls you to faith He calls you to a life of forgiveness and repentance. He now sees you as if He sees Christ – perfect. Sure, there are things that are going on in our life that are difficult and sinful and ugly but he does not say that now is how I see you. I see you as I see Christ – forgiven.

So, if you're here married and you're struggling what is the call in your life? To walk in righteousness. Come together. Work it out. Wait on God. Seek Counsel. If you're divorced and you're here what do you do? You see that you are forgiven. Sometimes I talk to people and this clouds how they view themselves and I want to say to them let it go. God has. You're holding on to something. God has forgiven you. In fact, I love the psalmist imagery in Psalm 103 he say as far as the east is from the west so far as He as removed our

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transgression. I love that image. Do you ever think about this imagery? He didn't say from the north to the south because then that wouldn't work right? Because if I want to drive south I can drive south for a long time but at some point because we live on a globe you're going to start going north. He didn't say that. You know, when you start going to the east you can travel east infinity – for eternity. You just keep going east even when you're in the west you're going east as long as you're pointed east. And if you decide to turn around you go west you're going to go west, around the globe and you're going to keep going. Do you see the imagery here? He's saying that this is infinity. I have separated this sin of yours that you have bound in your mind as far as possible. Let it go. From this point forward you know the biblical commands. Live in righteousness.

You see, you follow a gracious God and whether it's a divorce, a sexual sin, a failure of lying, a failure of any – you put in the blank you serve the same, gracious God. Let it go. Let's pray.