

1. Whether You are Divorced or Widowed

- a. "Unmarried" is differentiated from "widows" (v8, once married but no longer b/c of death) and from "virgins" (v34, never married)
 - i. This means that this category must be defined as those who have been married at one point, but are no longer married, *but are not widowed*
 - ii. This only leaves "divorced" (with papers) or "abandoned" (without papers) as possible options
 - iii. It cannot refer to "widowers" as some say, because the term is used in the immediate context to refer to women (v11) as one who has separated from her husband
- b. IDEAL: Good to remain single
- c. EXCEPTION: OK to marry if self-control is an issue
 - i. The point is not that singleness is a higher spiritual virtue, but that it has practical advantages only
 - ii. The real point is that one ought to serve the Lord in holiness, seeking how best to please Him, to glorify God with our bodies in whatever condition that He has called us

2. Whether You are Married to a Believer

- a. IDEAL: No divorce in the Church
- b. EXCEPTION: If there is divorce, then no remarriage to another, but only reconciliation to the believing spouse
- c. The Essence of Marriage is *Covenant to Oneness*
 - i. Leave and Cleave/Covenant: Vows are promises and promises have to do with the future. Wedding vows are not to be mere statements of the present ("I love you. You make me laugh. I care for you.").
 1. In a wedding you are not so much declaring your present love, but rather promises your future love. I promise to be faithful, tender, compassionate, supportive, truthful, etc. regardless of any condition on either person. It is a promise of future resilient love, service, and honor.
 - a. To say "I love you" is not marriage.
 2. If marriage was a feeling, or to make babies, then it would be a moment to moment thing, but if the essence of the marriage is a covenant of oneness, then it is a permanent thing, an unbreakable unchanging thing, and it controls your future
 - a. Consider: The only way to not be controlled by your past is through forgiveness of those who have harmed you. The only way to not be controlled by your momentary and fleeting affections is through a promise, a covenant.
Forgiveness and Promise: Marriage.
 - ii. Marriage is this way because it is sourced in God Himself, who vows to His people, marries them (Hos 2:16-20), and promises them not merely love in this moment, but abiding and faithful love into the future.
 1. Our sin and failure to love God well does not dictate his commitment or His faithfulness, but it does affect our experience of intimacy with the Lord
 2. In the same way, our sins against our spouses damage our experience of intimacy, but they should not affect our love, honor, service, or faithfulness
 3. Our pursuit of oneness does not depend upon the pursuit of oneness of our spouse, but rather upon our desire to please and honor the Lord, to rest in His pursuit of oneness with us, then to love the other out of such joy-filled hope in Christ Jesus
- d. Covenanting to Oneness images God's very character
 - i. The foundational reflection of the image of God at the beginning was marriage
 - ii. This means that your marriage is NOT your own, nor is primarily and foundationally about you, but it is about GOD

1. Are we asking how best to honor God, or are we seeking how best make ourselves happy according to our own assessments?
- iii. Strive to proclaim God's very character in the way that you covenant!!
 1. Make a conscious, Christ-dependent, prayerful, effort to seek the good and the joy of your spouse in every way in love, service, and honor
- iv. When both husband and wife do this, there is GREAT JOY and DEEP God-like ONENESS!
 1. It is uniquely glorious and uniquely proclaiming to the world of the greatness of the goodness of God!
 2. You image Him so clearly in this moments, honor Him so greatly at these times
- v. Striving for this oneness is HARD, because it means dying to serving your own needs and pouring yourself out for the sake of another, but it is gloriously good!
 1. JUST LIKE JESUS DID FOR YOU!!
 2. It requires daily, deep, cleansing, dependence upon God through Christ Jesus
- e. In this Light of This Purpose, Divorce, De-cleaving, REIMAGES God Grotesquely
 - i. Divorce is the opposite of oneness, it is an amputation
 1. We live in a society where divorce is seen as changing clothes, but because of the oneness of marriage, it is more like taking off your arm or leg
 2. More than that, because marriage is something God has done (What God has joined together), the separation of such oneness is so devastating that Jesus says not to let any man do it (let no man tear apart)
 - ii. Amputation can be survived, but the effects are lifelong and devastating and radically transformative.
 1. Like amputation, it is not something to be considered lightly, nor is it something to be considered simply because there is pain, or suffering, or hurt
 2. Amputation is reserved for the direst life-threatening circumstances, so ought divorce never even be considered unless there is a life-threatening harm with no other cure or such a devastation of oneness because of sexual immorality (Mat 19:9)
 - iii. Divorce is only permissible because at least one member's hardness of heart requires such drastic horrific action as amputation
 1. There are times to amputate, there is a time to divorce, when oneness has been willfully and consistently broken by one party
 - a. Jesus gives such a time: *porneia* – sexual immorality *due to the hardness of heart*
 - i. I would caution here quickly: it is better to forgive a *repentant* spouse than to divorce
 - ii. Yet, it may be necessary to amputate when there is no repentance
 2. Remember the Corinthian context: they were divorcing *for spiritual virtue*, and it is this reason that Paul finds remarriage to another impossible
 - a. Sexual Immorality (and desertion, I would argue from v15 and from 1 Tim 5:8) make a remarriage, or new oneness to another *allowable*, though not preferable
 - i. The fact that Paul does not mention *porneia* as an exclusion to this command, which Jesus so clearly does in Matt 19, even though *porneia* is so clearly in the context, gives evidence that the reasons for divorce between believers in Corinth was not this reason, but rather the false concept of their “realized eschatology” that marriage was, in itself, evil
 - ii. In the light of this, if they had divorced one another for this reason, they were to remain unmarried or to be remarried to their believing spouse
 - b. Desertion seems to indicate that one is not a believer, for 1 Tim 5:8 states that such is “worse than an unbeliever”
 - iv. De-cleaving in divorce is completely unlike God, who has cleaved to the Church in Christ!

1. We must learn to view our commitment to our spouse as preaching – they are some of the loudest proclamations of what God is like – divorce and remarriage to another proclaims that God may give up on His people
 - a. If you have done this, know also that with repentance comes mercy, and with confession comes cleansing – God is merciful for you in Christ Jesus!
 - b. Know also that from today forward you can covenant to oneness, to trust Jesus and obey, to hope in the midst of suffering for your Lord is alive for your good
2. Now, please know that there is forgiveness when we repent of all sin, so divorce is no different
 - a. I would argue that if you have divorced your spouse unbiblically and remarried, we need to recognize what it proclaimed about God was wrong, then receive the forgiveness of God and move forward to proclaim Him well in oneness with your current spouse
3. If you are contemplating divorce ASK FOR HELP FROM HIS CHURCH, to please the Lord with faithfulness and seek to image God rightly as far as it depends upon you out of love for the Lord
 - a. Often we need one another to preach living hope to us, to point us and sometimes carry us to Jesus
 - b. Church, come alongside such sufferers with compassion, patience, and the promises of God!
 - c. Let the hardness of heart be measured by the Church, not merely by the one who is suffering: we are not independent
4. If you have been divorced, you have not necessarily sinned!
 - a. Yet you may feel the effects of the amputation.
 - b. Flee to the One who never leaves His people (Jesus), but has had to deal with a spouse who was unfaithful (us!), and loves you to death...literally...and lives to hold your honor secure
5. If you have been divorced, know this: God relates to your suffering personally.
 - a. God calls himself a divorced person (Isa 50) when we deserted him and committed adultery with the idols of our hearts
 - b. He knows the betrayal, the pain, the rejection, and HE ENTERED INTO YOUR SUFFERING TO REDEEM YOU OUT OF IT

3. Whether You are Married to an Unbeliever (The Rest)

- a. don't divorce your unbelieving spouse if they accept you as a Christian
 - i. Your presence has a sanctifying effect on your family
 1. Your spouse is in a distinctly different place of blessing because of your presence
 2. Your children are distinctly different because of your presence
 - a. Apart from your presence, they are "unclean" -
 - ii. All of this has a *covenantal* feel which was consistent with Israel and its relationship to God: The remnant of believers sanctified the whole. See Rom 11:16
 1. In the same way, we are holy by being united to the Holy One, Christ Jesus. His "root" makes us "branches" clean.
 2. Thus, while some were divorcing unbelieving spouses, thinking that they were being tainted or made unclean by their union, Paul is stating the opposite: that they are making their spouses holy and their children clean by remaining in the marriage
 3. This element of union, covenant, blessing, was enough for Paul to state that one should not leave a marriage thinking that it tainted the believer.
 - iii. Divorcing one's unbelieving spouse after becoming a believer works against peace.
 1. yet, if the unbeliever wants to dissolve the union, then the Christian is free
 2. GENERAL RULE: Don't be contentious either way, but peaceable

- a. Adorn the doctrines of God by living in Christ-like humility, service, love, sacrifice, truth, fruit of the Spirit, etc. whether remaining in married or being divorced.
 - b. If the unbeliever divorces the Christian, then the Christian is free from their obligations as spouse.
 - i. Literally, "they are not enslaved", and they are moved into the "unmarried" category
 - 1. Where it is better not to be remarried
 - 2. Yet there is freedom to remarry if self-control is an issue, only in the Lord (of course)
4. Whether You Have Never Been Married (The Virgins)
- a. I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment
 - i. it is good to remain as he is (single)
 - ii. it is good to marry
 - iii. it is better to remain single
 - 1. I'm just trying to spare you worldly afflictions
 - 2. I want to promote good order and devotion to the Lord without distraction
 - b. We must see that this is the reason that God has told you, O single Christian, to marry only to those who also desire to image God rightly and are committed to Jesus Christ
 - i. It is a truth for life, a *soulishly* good command to guard you and cause you to flourish
 - 1. For your marriage to be all that it was meant to be, it means opening all the way up to somebody, all the way down deep and if your love looks into the foundation of your soul, and can't figure it out at all, you feel used when they either yawn or laugh
 - 2. If you willingly and wittingly pursue a person with whom you cannot truly find that deep soul intimacy at such a level, you are bound to have a shallow friendship with shallow intimacy
 - a. I know that some of you are here in your marriages, married to unbelievers, and feel the weight of this reality
 - b. I only state this principle as a warning to those still single, who have yet to covenant with another, to help them avoid these things
 - ii. Also, if this is the essence and purpose of marriage, then how are you looking for a spouse?
 - 1. What are your priorities in dating? Are you looking for a man whom you can bare your ENTIRE soul to and find compassionate love?
 - 2. Are you looking for a woman who deeply wants to honor and image God rightly above all other things?
 - 3. Or, are you starting with romance and sexual attraction and hoping for friendship after that?
 - a. How do you "filter" the prospects? Physical attraction first or spiritual attraction first?
 - b. Only one kind of quality actually grows over time...and it's not physical attraction.
5. REASON: "Brother, in whatever each one was called, let him remain near God in this."
- a. Right smack in the middle of this section is the heart of the entire section (is this a huge chiasm?)
 - b. GENERAL RULE: "Remain as you are" (mentioned 5 times)
 - i. Trust the Lord with where you are situated in life in every sphere
 - ii. Do not demand, nor anxiously pursue, a change in circumstance
 - 1. Take what is offered, but do not break peace to escape
 - 2. But do not be overly concerned with a change in circumstances, a removal from suffering, but concern yourself with remaining near to God
 - c. "Remain near [*para*, "in the presence of"] God in whatever situation you were in when you were called."
 - i. Remaining in nearness to God is the power to live well in whatever circumstance

A believer may be in the saddest and darkest condition imaginable. Even so, the Holy Spirit is able to break through all this and bring to mind the promises of Christ. By this work, the Holy Spirit enables Christians to sit in dungeons, rejoice in flames and glory in troubles. If he brings to mind the promises of Christ for our comfort, neither Satan nor man, neither sin nor the world, nor even death itself, shall take away our comfort. – John Owen

- ii. It is also the point of the Christian life, so that all other virtues flow from the fountainhead of the presence of God and the pursuit of pleasing the Lord (v32)
 - 1. Psalm 16 – “You have made known to me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy, your right hand pours out delights”
- iii. It is this command which makes the weird section about living as if you weren't going through what you are going through in 29-31 make sense.
 - 1. We grieve as those who have hope (1 Thess 4:13-14)
 - 2. We labor as those who have rest (Matt 11:28; Heb 4:1)
 - 3. We work out our salvation with fear and trembling because God is working in us to will and achieve His good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13)
 - 4. We love those who persecute us and bless those who curse us, living as if we were not persecuted or cursed (Luke 6:28; Rom 12:14)
- d. Whether single or married: Set Your Eyes on Your Living Hope: **SEEK JESUS FOR YOURSELF!**
 - i. It is not the solution to seek a marriage, or a better marriage, but rather to seek a better savior and strength for this moment: Jesus the Risen and Returning
 - 1. Ultimately, we love one another well not to have a better relationship, but because it pleases God for you to be like Him, and because by His Spirit we delight to love sinners.
 - 2. When you see Jesus loving and serving and honoring other people, you see that you can't live up to that, but you're looking at it wrong.
 - ii. Rather, you must see Jesus loving, serving, and honoring you so that you don't NEED that from another person and can love others well regardless of their love for you!

“When Christ is my hope, he becomes the one thing in which I have confidence. I act on his wisdom and bank on his grace. I trust his promises and I rely on his presence. And I pursue all the good things that he has promised me simply because I trust him. So, I am not manipulating, controlling, or threatening my way through life to get what I want, because I have found what I want in Christ. He is my hope.”— Paul David Tripp

- e. The Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, the One who spoke in the garden, the holy one became a baby, tormented on the cross, dying to release His right to well-deserved glory **TO BRING YOU IN**
 - i. When you realize that you were the deserter of God (Isa 50) and that we all have cheated on Him, committing adultery with the idols of our hearts (Hos 3; Ezek 16; James 4) AND you see His great faithfulness to you...how does your heart respond to being single or married to a sinner?
- f. If you know that *personally*, and if you *fill your heart with it*, it melts your heart towards others whatever your current condition, enabling you to love sacrificially, to honor undeservedly, to serve wholeheartedly with joy because Jesus is enough and your intimacy is found in His presence, and it pleases Him to love well!
- g. When you KNOW that God is for you, that He loves you perfectly, that the cross proves that Jesus holds you, keeps you, guards you as His beloved, then you able to open up to another person even though you might be mistreated, to pursue oneness in spite of the other's response
 - i. And amazingly, this often opens up the other person!
 - ii. But until you know that you are secure in the love of God and you delight to honor Him and glorify Him above all else, you will not serve others, even a spouse (they can hurt you the worst)
 - iii. If we avoid trusting Christ's love in such a way, for long enough, our hearts are hardened to his love and to loving and serving our spouses, and the result of the hardened heart?

- iv. Therefore, seek with all your heart to find your way to grasp deep in your soul the greatness of the glory of the grace of God towards you in Jesus Christ
 1. Spend your time at the cross, where Jesus suffered FOR YOU, and imbibe His covenant promises of the gift of His Holy Spirit, to strengthen your soul for the love of the saints
 2. Cling to Him, delight in Him, seek Him to see Him to savor Him so that you can satisfy Him by being like Him