



GOD'S DESIGN

The Gospel and Parenting

If you are doing the math in your study guide, you realize that the pace is about to pick up so that we will get to that last section eventually. So, here we go. Let's dive right in to God's design for parenting, the gospel and parenting.

Three primary passages that I put on the top of your notes there to inform kind of this discussion on parenting: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 at the very end.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Then, Ephesians 6:1-4, right after Paul talks about marriage, he talks about parenting:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Then, Colossians 3:20-21, very similarly, "*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*"

Gospel Foundations...

So, gospel foundations, foundations based upon the gospel. One: God gives children to families by His grace. They are a "*heritage from the Lord... Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!*" Psalm 127:3-5. Parents, your children belong to God, not primarily to you. He has entrusted them to you by His grace.

So, God gives children to families by His grace, and God gives children to families for His glory. This means that parents don't have the right to determine how to raise their children, for their agenda or for their convenience. Children are to be raised for the glory of God. This is huge. Just a reminder parents, the goal of biblical parenting is not to help your children to get a great education, be a great athlete, go on great dates, have a great career or make great money. All of these things are the world's definitions of success, and if we are not careful, we will take our kids to practices all over the place, teach them to get good grades, prioritize, take them to all these things that we fill their minds and their lives with, that they need to be successful in the world, but the problem is, one day, they are going to stand

before God, and all those things that we have told them are most important are going to burn up in the fire, and they are going to stand as beggars before God if they don't know what is most important. The goal of biblical parenting is to help our children to love a great God, Matthew 22, and accomplish a Great Commission. We want children that make the glory of God known to the ends of the earth no matter what it costs us.

I remind you parents: children belong to God, not ultimately to you, and Jesus actually expects them to leave you behind to make the gospel known in the world. Biblical parenting propels kids into mission; it doesn't hinder them from it. That changes the way that we parent.

Gospel Instructions to Parents...

So, gospel instructions to parents based on that. Two primary commands in Ephesians 6. We are working kind of from the back to the front in Ephesians 6:1-4. Number one: Instruct your children so they know the Word. "*Bring them up in the...instruction of the Lord.*" This is, literally, just an educational piece of parenting. You look in Scripture. The first time we even see a reference to teaching the Bible, it is in Genesis 18. Teaching God's Word is in Genesis 18 when God gives to Abraham responsibility for teaching his son.

What we just read a moment ago in Deuteronomy 6 makes clear: we must have a verbal commitment to the Word in our homes. We talk about the Word all the time as parents: a verbal commitment to the Word in our homes, and a visible commitment to the Word in our homes. Even when no one was speaking, the Word was evident in Deuteronomy 6; even when parents are gone. Word on the doorpost, houses and gates. Make the Word visible so the Word is passed on to the next generation, Psalm 78.

What we do. This is all based on Psalm 78. We teach the Scriptures from age to age, generation to generation. The Word is intended to be handed on like a baton, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Joshua 1:8, Hebrews 5:11-14. Teach your children to feast on the Word. Teach them who God is. Don't just teach them to obey religious rituals, to follow life skills, to know...teach them God. Teach them God is known by His Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2:1-16. Teach them who God is and teach them what God has done. Tell them, Psalm 78, the wonders God has done. Tell the stories. Tell your children that you are part of a long line.

When I gather together with Heather and our boys at night, and we have time in family worship, it is just this sobering reality that what we are doing when we come together at night with our kids, for time in prayer and in the Word and worship...we are doing what Hebrew families did during the Passover when they remembered blood on the doorposts of their houses, and I am telling them these same stories. The most popular song in our family worship time right now is "Father Abraham," and we just get up and do the whole motions. I don't think the motions are necessarily biblical, but the stories are.

So, we teach them the Scriptures. We tell them the stories. We warn against sinfulness. The whole context of Psalm 78 is a warning. Look at what the people of God had done in the past and how they didn't trust God; how they rebelled against God. Don't do that. Teach children to trust God based on those who have gone before us.

So, we warn against sinfulness, and we exalt the Savior. We tell our children how God has always been merciful to His people, how God triumphs over transgressions with His grace. Tell your children that, in Christ, God responds to our failures with His forgiveness, Exodus 34:6-7, and God responds to our faithlessness with His faithfulness. Oh, this is good.

Why would we not want to work hard to pass this gospel on, more than passing on who has the best stats on a football team? When we do, what will happen? Psalm 78 says, "They will know God in their minds." This is what we want. We want our children to know God deeply. That their boast, Jeremiah 9:23-24, would not be in money or riches or jobs or careers, but in God, and all throughout all of these passages...know God. While we instruct them in the Word, they will know God in their minds, and they will trust God in their hearts. So, the head-knowledge becomes heart-knowledge and their hearts would belong to God, that they would taste and see that God is good, Psalm 34:8-10.

Hearts longing for God; trust God in their hearts and then obeying God with their lives. Isn't this what we long for? Don't we long for children and students to walk out of our homes, to finish high school in the church and walk into the world knowing God in a way that some atheistic professor on a college campus can't shoot down their faith just like that, because they know a few facts here and there about God? We want our children to know God deeply and love God wholeheartedly and want to make the glory of God known to the ends of the earth sacrificially. This is what we want. So, this is what we are after in parenting.

Teach your children, so they know the Word, and then train your children so they obey the Word. "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it," (Proverbs 22:6). Ephesians 6 says, "Bring them up in the discipline of the Lord." Discipline. This is something we do out of love. The Bible is saying do this: lovingly train them, discipline them to follow after Christ.

Now, a reminder here based on 1 Corinthians 11:1 and Philippians 4:9: our children will not be what they cannot see. So, again, the best gift that we can give, men, to our children is being a man of God, and a husband who is sacrificially loving his wife as Christ loved the church. Mom, best gift you can give would be a woman of God who is lovingly, gladly submitting to her husband and following after Christ and honoring Christ. This is what we need.

One primary caution: Ephesians 6 says, "Fathers, [parents] do not provoke your children to anger." Discipline your children with love that leads them toward God, not with anger that leads them away from God. You know it's interesting, of all the things the Bible could tell us about parenting, why does it tell us this right here in Ephesians 6? I think the reason is two-fold. On one hand, we have a temptation to not discipline our children, to be the parent who thinks that loving children means avoiding discipline. Switch Ephesians 6:1 around and say, "Parents obey your children for this will keep them happy and bring peace to your home." Not biblical! Scripture says that if you do not discipline your children, you do not love your children. Discipline your children with love. Proverbs makes that clear, but don't go to the extreme, in a sense, that you begin to feed a heart...you're exasperating them in their heart. That doesn't see the love behind the discipline, and that's where Hebrews 12:5-11 is so helpful for us. Hebrews 12 reminds us that God is a good Father because He disciplines, and how He disciplines us out of love, and we mirror Him. So, those are gospel instructions to parents.

Gospel Instructions to Children...

Now, children. What I love about Ephesians 6 is how Paul addresses children directly. Children would likely be present in the church as a letter like the letter to the Ephesians would be read. The Bible says to children, you are made by God, which means you exist by Him and for Him, Colossians 1:16. What that means is, children, you are responsible to God. "Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right," (Ephesians 6:1). Don't miss what the Word is saying here.

Children, you live in a self-absorbed culture where you are the prime object of your worship, and life revolves around you in your mind, and Scripture says very clearly that is not true; you are under authority. God has made you, and He is Lord over you, and He has authority in your life, and you will be held accountable to the way that you respond to mom and dad.

So, what does God command you to do as a child? Two primary commands: Honor your parents with your attitude. Honor your father and your mother. Ascribe worth, literally, to your parents; value your parents. God takes this seriously. You look in the Old Testament, God says, "*Whoever strikes his father or mother shall be put to death,*" (Exodus 21:15). "*Whoever curses his father or mother shall be put to death,*" (Exodus 21:17). "*Every one of you shall revere his mother and father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God,*" (Leviticus 19:3). This is pretty important to God.

You say, "Well, how do I honor my parents?" In Ephesians 6:1, it says obey your parents with your actions. "*Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*" That word "obey" is a great compound word; it, literally, means to hear in a way that you put it into practice. In other words, you obey your parents first by hearing what they say, listening to them, to their advice, their instruction, their commands and doing what they say; even though it's not always easy. Obviously, children will find themselves doing things that they don't want to do, but God says, "Do this, even when you don't understand why." Colossians 3:20, "*Obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*" This is pleasing to God, and not to obey is offensive to God.

So, this is a caution in Ephesians 6, and it is serious. One primary caution for children: to dishonor or disobey your parents is to rebel against God. The only exception to that would be if your parents are telling you to do something that is clearly against God's will in His Word. Obviously, you don't follow a parent into rebellion against God, but that one exception aside, all over Scripture...Exodus 21, Leviticus 19-20, Deuteronomy 21...God says that, "If you disobey mom or dad, you disobey me. To rebel against mom or dad is to rebel against me."

If you are a 16-year-old, and you decide that you are going to go against what your mom or dad has said, you are not just setting yourself up against them, you are setting up yourself against God. So, don't be the kind of student, teenagers, who talks about how much you love God and want to grow in God and do great things for God and go home and disobey your parents. Your spiritual life is not expressed, primarily, by what happens in the youth group; your spiritual life is primarily expressed in what happens in your home.

Gospel Promises...

God says all of this for a reason because there is a promise here, a gospel promise. "*Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you,*" Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:15. So, as the gospel transforms our relationships as children and parents, God says, "Hear this promise: I will satisfy your lives, it will go well with you, and not only will it go well with you, but you will enjoy long life on earth." Now, obviously, that is open to misinterpretation if we individualize it, if we think, "Well, if I obey my parents, then I will live till I'm 80 or 90 years old." That is not what the Bible is saying; it would break down on so many different levels, but this promise was given in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5...given to a people...to the people of Israel, and then, here in Ephesians 6, to the body of Christ, and God was saying to His people, "You live, parents, to pass the Word onto the next generation, and, children, you live to receive that Word and pass it on, and you, the people of God, will enjoy a long life on earth. I will satisfy your lives, and I will multiply your legacy."

Personal Reflections on the Gospel, Parents, and Children...

Which leads me to some personal reflections on the gospel, parents and children, and that's exactly what they are. I put Psalm 128 here. This is the text that I preached at my dad's funeral. My dad, best friend, died suddenly, unexpectedly of a heart attack when I was in seminary, and these were the words that most expressed the fruit of my dad's life, and this is flowing from that.

I won't have time to explain all this, but, one: the favor of God is found in the fear of God. My lowercase "f" father taught me to fear my uppercase "F" Father. He taught me in the healthiest ways to fear dishonoring my father, both on earth and in heaven. The wisdom of God, second, is found in the Word of God. Only one source of true wisdom, that's the ways and the words of God. By God's grace, my dad loved the Word. He was really excited when I went to seminary, because he got to experience seminary vicariously through me. I gave him a copy of my Systematic Theology textbook, and for a while, I couldn't call home without getting questioned on my view of the atonement, nature of man, nature of God, pneumatology, angelology, eschatology, ecclesiology, and finally, I just had to say, "Man, can I just talk to mom? I just want to talk to mom!" Preaching was a whole other story. He would call me up, and he would say, "Hey, I have been working on a sermon. Maybe try this one out and let me know how it goes." So, wisdom of God found in the Word of God.

Third, a wife is a treasure to be cherished. Cherished. My dad loved my mom well, and I and my two brothers and my sisters saw it. Children are a gift to be nurtured. "*Your children will be like olive shoots around your table,*" (Psalm 128:3). My dad loved his children by living for them and laying his life down to invest in them.

These last three reflections: just the life that counts flows from the presence of God. My dad taught me to pray in the living room of our home, to live in the presence of God. A life that counts advances the gospel of God, and a life that counts multiplies the glory of God. Psalm 128 says, "*May you [live to] see your children's children.*" To be honest, this is one of the hardest parts of Psalm 128 for me because, by all accounts, it seems like the blessing of God was all over my dad, and Psalm 128 lines up so directly in so many ways, but, needless to say, my dad never got to meet Caleb or see Joshua or any other children the Lord may entrust to me. However, I will let you in on a little secret that my dad, in his wisdom, knew. My dad knew that God is glorified in the man that loves and serves his family, and the life that counts is not limited to what he sees in this life. A life that counts is consumed with what you will be able to see in the next life, and I pray that one day he will see his children's children. Parenting is important. It is eternally important.

GOD'S DESIGN

The Gospel and the Orphan

The gospel and parenting which leads to the gospel and the orphan. As if talking about my dad was not enough to make my heart a little tender, this issue makes my heart a little more tender. Some of you know that we had the privilege of adopting our first son Caleb from Kazakhstan. We didn't think we were able to have children biologically, but two weeks after we got home, it turned out that my wife was pregnant. So, apparently what happens in Kazakhstan doesn't stay in Kazakhstan. Just want to give you a little foretaste of what is to come later in the evening, just a little taste, just a little taste. So, nine months later, our son Joshua came along, and in the process of adoption, we have just learned so much about God's care for the orphan.

It is all over Old Testament. Psalm 10:17-18, "O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed." Psalm 27:10: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in." Then, James 1:27, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Gospel Foundations...

So, we talked about, at the last Secret Church, kind of a doctrine of adoption, and so, I am going to fly through some of this stuff here, but I simply want to show you the foundation, the gospel foundation for orphan care in the church and ask you to pray about whatever that might mean in your life and in your family. There is no legislative picture of what this should look like in all of our lives and our families, but for us in the church, it is a priority upon us to care for the orphan. So, just let this soak in.

By God's grace, we have been adopted as sons of God. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons," (Galatians 4:4-5). What a great...there is so much in this verse. The reality is adoption requires someone who comes at the right time. God sending His Son to the earth when the fullness of time has come; that was not an accident; it was intentional in every way. Jesus came at the right time theologically, religiously, culturally, politically. It's not that God was up in heaven thinking, "Hmm, seems like things are lining up well; good time to send my Son." No, God in His sovereignty designed all history to this point...this point in time.

At the right time, adoption requires someone who has the right qualifications. In order to adopt internationally, you, basically, have to show two governments that you are the ideal family. In order to take the penalty for our sin, there must be someone with the perfect qualifications, and Jesus had and has them: fully divine, fully human, fully righteous. From God, born of woman, born under law: right qualifications.

Finally, adoption requires someone who has the right resolve. Nobody adopts accidentally; you adopt purposefully. The beauty is that we once stood in our sin, abandoned to our sins, separate from a Holy God for all of eternity, and Jesus Christ pursued us and, "in love, he predestined us for adoption as sons," (Ephesians 1:3-10). He determined to redeem us, and He died to rescue us, to adopt us.

So, by God's grace, we have been adopted as sons of God, and for God's glory, we have been given the privileges of sonship. So, not just position as sons, but privileges of sonship. The gospel doesn't just say, "Okay, now you are a son, just live however you want." The reality is, Heather and I stood outside a court room in Kazakhstan where we adopted Caleb from, and we were just weeping after this judge makes this pronouncement that he's now our son. That is not where the story ended; that's where the story began, and, in a whole new way, where we had been told at every point in this adoption journey to guard our hearts because you never know when something might not go through, and so now, as this pronouncement comes, we were just freed to pour out our hearts. We would bring him into this little apartment where we were staying in Kazakhstan, and we just began to shower him with love. This is the thing; this is how Caleb knows that he is my son now. Not because of what happened a couple years ago in Kazakhstan. He knows he's my son now because I woke him up this morning, gave him a hug and a kiss, I told him I loved him and started wrestling with him on the floor. That's love.

So, there is not a biblical parallel for that part, but love, yes. The reality is we are sons and daughters of God. He is our Father. We pray to our "*Father in heaven,*" (Matthew 6:7-9). He loves us. He understands us. He provides for us. We don't have any reason to worry; we have a Father in heaven, Matthew 6:25-34. He loves to give, and He loves to forgive. He forgives us. Do we still sin against Him? Yes, dreadfully we do, but we have a Father who forgives us. He disciplines us; we need it, Hebrews 12:5-11. He leads us, "*All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God,*" (Romans 8:14).

He is Father, and we are His children, and as His children, brothers and sisters, we have a new name. We have a new spirit. "*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*" (Romans 8:16). We have access to the Father's presence.

So, I come home from work, and the boys meet me as I come in. They jump on me, and they initiate the wrestling. Joshua, just immediately introduce...we just have to introduce, says, "Introducing, Daddy the Dominator, Caleb the Crusher, and Joshua the Arizona-wona Lizard." This is who we are; we just go at it, and this is the privilege we have because fathers and sons.

To think that we have access to the presence of God our Father, to enjoy and to be with Him, let's go to His throne with confidence. "*Enter the [most] holy places by the blood of Jesus,*" (Hebrews 10:19). "*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons,*" (Romans 8:15). and by it we cry, "Abba, Daddy, Father." Why run after the pleasures and pursuits and things of this world when you have a Father who is ready to give you everything you want and everything you need?

Gospel Implications...

So, what are the implications of this? I think they are clear. We worship God as our Father. "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,*" (Matthew 6:9). We glorify God our Father. Let them "*see your good works*" and glorify Him (Matthew 5:16). Imitate God our Father. We obey God our Father, and here it is: we reflect God our Father. He is the Father of the fatherless so those who follow Him visit orphans (James 1:27).

You know what is interesting about that word "visit"? It, literally, means "to look after." You are like, "Whoa, what was that? I don't even know where we are." Keep going, keep going, told you we are picking up the pace. You look at that word "visit" in James 1:27, and it, literally, means to "look after" to "attend to." Not just to visit to say, "Hello," but "to take responsibility for." The same word...we won't go through all these Scriptures, but all the Scriptures under James 1:27...all of these different Scriptures are using the same term that is translated "visit" in James 1:27, and you will see how God provides for His people, redeems His people, takes responsibility for His people. That word "visit" has an antonym...has an opposite...and that opposite is "to neglect," "to forget." So, you have "look after," "take responsibility for," or "neglect" or "forget."

So, here is the deal. There are over 140 million orphans in the world. That number can be a bit misleading if we are not careful because, by that definition of "orphan," that includes anyone who has lost a parent, so that doesn't necessarily mean children who have lost both of their parents. Nevertheless, there are millions and millions of children who have lost both of their parents; many of them who have absolutely no family to care for them. So, I would say, on the authority of God's Word, to brothers and sisters who have been adopted by God, ignorance regarding orphans is biblically inexcusable.

You know this is one of the things I learned in the adoption process in my own life. I'd read the statistics before. I'd seen a number of orphans in the world, and they were overwhelming, but if I am honest, they were still just numbers to me. Everything changed on our first trip to this orphanage in Kazakhstan, and I saw children playing outside, and I walked past their rooms inside, and, suddenly, those names, those numbers on pages became alive in my heart, because I realized it was Caleb who was sleeping in one of those cribs, and it was Caleb who was included in those numbers. All of a sudden, numbers became real and personal, and I realized orphans are easier to forget until you see their faces. They are easier to forget until you know their names. It's easier to pretend they are not real until you hold them in your arms, but once you do, everything changes. That's why I would ask, "Are you willing to see their faces and get to know their names and hold them in your arms? Are you willing to visit, look after, those who have no one to look after them?"

In light of this word in James 1:27, I think it is clear that inaction is action. Do not forget, do not overlook. See how the gospel uniquely drives orphan care. This is huge. So, there is almost a trend in some ways, today, toward adoption and people adopting for humanitarian, altruistic reasons. When you get down to it, some are adopting just because it seems like a neat thing to do. It would be nice to have a cute Christmas card with somebody different, from a different country, on there. We wouldn't say that out loud, but sometimes that's what we are thinking in the back of our minds, and I want to encourage you, if that is your motivation, not to adopt.

The reality is, adoption may not be an easy road. As we have put a huge emphasis here in this faith family on adoption, many families have gone through really challenging circumstances, and it's not always easy, whether here in the church or people I talk to beyond this church. What are you going to do when a child may come into your midst who is a physical threat to your other children? What are you going to do when that child, who for years has had people push him or her off, such that, now, whenever you try to show love to him or her, they resist it at every turn? What are you going to do when it is tough? The reality is the only thing that will sustain you at that point is the gospel that reminds you that you too were once dead in sin, totally abandoned from your Father, and He continued to pursue you. Though there is nothing in you to draw Him to you, He still pursued you. That is where we realize that we care for orphans not because we are rescuers. We are not a group of good, altruistic people out to be saviors for orphans around the world. That's not what drives orphan ministry. We care for orphans not because we are rescuers; we care for orphans because we are the rescued, and the gospel drives that.

So, our story continues. To make a long story really short, we knew we wanted to adopt again, and so, a few years ago, we started the process again, and there have been a lot of ups and downs and challenges along the way, but today, we got news that two weeks from now, we will go to China and pick up a little girl there. So, let's show you a picture of her on the screen. Okay, there's like a billion people in China, but this is the cutest one there is, and we...there's actually a group from Brook Hills that has gone to the orphanage where she is, and they had an opportunity to take her gifts from us, but this gift did not come from us; somebody gave her that. So, just look at the look on her face, she's like, "What? How did I get stuck with a family that's like is rebelling against the American Dream? Everything I have been told, leaving it behind." May God receive great glory in the church as the gospel compels you and me to care for orphans. The gospel and the orphan.

GOD'S DESIGN

The Gospel and Singleness

All right, two more facets here: the gospel and singleness. Something I don't think we have addressed very well in the church. You look in Christian bookstores, you will find tons of books on marriage and parenting, and there is very little on singleness. The content is really interesting because few of the marriage books argue that marriage is a good thing; that is pretty much accepted. Instead they talk about all the problems in marriage and how to deal with those problems. So, Christian books on marriage tell you how to deal with problems in marriage.

On the other hand, books on singleness take a different approach; they almost imply that singleness is a problem. They tell a single how to make the most of the time until the right person finally comes along. In other words, they say the solution to the problem of singleness is marriage, and then, you can go buy the books and deal with all the problems in marriage. So, there has got to be a better answer than this.

I am going to warn you, we are about to read some verses in the New Testament that are going to go against the grain...just like just about everything else tonight...from Paul who is going to say, recommend, that we stay single. There, Paul, if he were here today would be marginalized to say the least. Single church leader? Obviously, something is wrong with him: it's his looks, he's just not that smart, social standards too high? What's his sexual orientation anyway? There has got to be something wrong for him not to have found a wife. This kind of thinking is a problem. We need to understand, not what the world says about singleness, but what the Word says about singleness.

So, let's dive in, and married adults do not tune me out; we desperately need to recover how to best encourage, support and serve alongside our brothers and sisters in the church. This topic is for all of us. So, here is what we are going to do: we are going to dive into 1 Corinthians 7, which is...just a side note on 1 Corinthians 7. The passages we are about to read...this is Paul addressing specific situations in the church at Corinth. So, he is not just sitting down saying, "All right, I am going to write a theology of marriage and singleness." So, he is addressing specific things. We don't know all of the specific things he is addressing, but just remember, this is a letter written in a context to a people where you have struggles going on. This is what he wrote:

Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Corinthians 7:6-9).

So, skipping down, we are skipping a little down, sections in between...

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all 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 uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should

remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bondservant of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God" (1 Corinthians 7:17-24).

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

Gospel Foundations: Four Bases for Understanding Singleness...

Okay, split this up. This time into gospel foundations. So, basis for understanding singleness, then gospel celebration. I want to give you four reasons to delight in singleness based on Scripture and the gospel in particular: foundations...four bases.

First, and probably the simplest but most important: both singleness and marriage are good. Obviously, we have seen that marriage is good. When you look at 1 Corinthians 7:1, you see that Paul begins this discussion with talking about the goodness of singleness. Now, that sounds like a simple statement, particularly, for many of us in a culture here where approximately half of adults today are not married, but that is not the culture of the first century; it's not the culture of pagan Corinth, and really wasn't even the culture of the Bible.

I want you to think of the progress of redemptive history real quick with me here. You look at Genesis 1 in which we have already seen, and the first command given to man was to be fruitful and multiply the earth and subdue it. So, how do we do that? Genesis 2:24, we become one flesh, you marry, you have babies, you multiply in the earth. So, when you get to Genesis 12, God promises Abraham...covenant promise...and the covenant promise revolves around babies. "You are going to have children," and the same thing is repeated over and over again to his sons Isaac and Jacob, Genesis 26, Genesis 28.

You notice, when you read through Genesis, some of the tense moments are when there is barrenness, when children aren't coming. This is where tension comes in because, Genesis 48:16, your name was virtually cut off from the earth if you didn't have kids. Deuteronomy 25:6, your name "*blotted out of Israel*" if you don't have a child. As a result, you don't want to be single. Singleness was, basically, a curse. You think about those who were single in the Old Testament: eunuchs who would most often have their physical...sexual...physical capacity taken away from them; widows, and often those widows would remarry soon; singles included those with diseases like leprosy who were unapproachable; those who were divorced which was, obviously, not looked upon favorably. If you were a young man or woman, you were married as a young teenager as soon as possible. You didn't want to be single. It was undesirable because the blessing of God was evident in marriage and children.

Then, you get to Isaiah 53:10, and you see this prophecy of Christ, and it says who shall speak of His descendants, "*He shall see his offspring.*" Do you catch that? Jesus, a single

man cut off from the earth, Isaiah 53 says, but He has offspring. Who are His offspring? Those whose sin He bore. The picture we have prophesied here in the Old Testament is the Son of God multiplying the people of God, not by physical procreation, but by spiritual regeneration. In other words, through Christ the Kingdom would go from...not going to multiply by having babies...the Kingdom is going to multiply by new birth: people being born again. You are not part of the people of God because you are born into a certain people; you are part of the people of God because you are born again, and this would change everything.

You look at it in the next chapter. Isaiah 54:1 says, "*Sing, O barren woman...*" Why burst into song? Because the Lord is your Maker. The Lord God is your Maker...is your husband, and He is giving you new life, life through His Spirit. Then, in Isaiah 56:3-5, it talks about eunuchs, don't worry, you are not "*a dry tree.*" Your name will "*not be cut off.*" Why? Because the Kingdom of God is not dependent on physical offspring. The Kingdom expands through spiritual offspring, and your name will be better, He says, "*than sons and daughters.*" So that when you get to Matthew 19:10-12 in the New Testament, Jesus says it's good to be a eunuch for the Kingdom. In other words, it's good not to be married. This is huge.

When we get to 1 Corinthians 7, and Paul is talking positively about singleness, and we realize the gospel changed everything here. The Old Testament people of God were multiplying almost exclusively through marriage and children, but now, the picture in the New Testament is the people of God that are born, not of natural birth, but through the Spirit of the living God. Whether or not you are married or single, the new birth can be a reality.

So, the New Testament, as we have already seen, radically affects marriage, but it also radically affects singleness. So, here is the picture when you take the whole of Scripture. You see, biblically, marriage is expected. By expected, I mean it's the norm. It's definitely the norm in the Old Testament, and from all we can tell in the New Testament, it is continued norm. It's a good thing. Even Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:14, he encourages younger women to marry, which we will see later. Marriage is designed by God as a good thing; we have seen that.

Also, biblically, singleness is exceptional. I use that word in two ways. First to communicate that singleness is not the norm. Right before Jesus talks about singleness, He talks about marriage. Now, listen to John Stott, one of my favorite theologians and writers, a man who gave his life around the world for the advancement of the gospel and recently passed away in his 70's; spent 70-plus years single. He wrote, "God's general will for His human creation is marriage. We single people must not resist this truth. Marriage is the norm, singleness the abnorm." So, it's exceptional in that way; and it's exceptional in the sense that it is a good thing...a very good thing.

The gospel brings dignity to singleness in valuing them equally with those who are married. You think about the New Testament, who is in the single corner? You have John the Baptist, although wearing camel's hair and eating wild locusts probably had something to do with that, but okay. Him aside, we have Jesus. Think about this: Jesus the most full, complete human person that ever lived: not married. Living out your manhood or womanhood, for that matter, is not dependent on marriage. Jesus was a man, the perfect man, and you see other exceptional men and women who are single: Silas, Luke, Titus, Apollos, Lydia, Phoebe, Philip's four unmarried daughters, all throughout the New Testament. So, Scripture makes clear: marriage is good, singleness is good. It is wrong, biblically, to declare that one

is better than the other. That would go against Scripture and Christ Himself. So, they are both good.

Second, both singleness and marriage portray the gospel. We have already seen this in Ephesians 5 when it comes to marriage: marriage portraying Christ's sacrificial love for the church; the church's submissive obedience to Christ. You might think, "Well, I want to portray this, so I want to get married," but there is a way that singleness also portrays the gospel in a beautiful, different, powerful way. Singleness portrays two things here I want to point out. One, singleness portrays the Christian's ultimate identity in Christ. The world would say you need a husband or you need a wife to complete you, but singleness reminds us that this is not true, that in Christ, we are complete regardless of marital status. In a very real sense, just as these Scriptures describe here, the Lord is husband to His people, more satisfying and eternally satisfying than any physical spouse. There are truths about the supremacy of Christ that are, in a sense, displayed more clearly in singleness than in marriage. Singleness says clearly to the world, "Christ is my satisfaction, and I do have in Him everything I need."

Listen to the words of Amy Carmichael and her singleness: "There is joy, joy found in nowhere else, when we can look up into Christ's face when He says to us, 'Am I not enough for thee, Mine own?' with a true, 'Yes, Lord, Thou art enough.'"

So, singleness portrays the Christian's ultimate identity in Christ, and then, on a church-level, singleness portrays the Christian's eternal identification with the church. So, Genesis 2:18 is still true, "*It is not good for man to be alone.*" However, no man or no woman is intended to be alone in the church; surrounded by brothers and sisters that are in a very real, eternal sense far more precious and far more important than any other relationship, even that between a husband and a wife, just like we talked about earlier. Only relationship with Christ with His church is eternal. Even marriage, as we are going to talk about, is passing away.

So, you think about it. In light of all of redemptive history in Scripture, in the past...old covenant...singleness was avoided by most. We have seen that. In the present...new covenant...singleness is advantageous for many. I hesitate to use "many" here because biblically, marriage is still the norm, but "many" certainly seems to be what Paul seems to be saying, and there are many prevalent examples of singles in the New Testament, so follow this. In the future...new creation...singleness will be applied to all. Married people will only be married for this life, then for billions and billions of years, we will be single...forever. Marriage is a temporary institution, Matthew 22:30. So, singleness, in a very real way, portrays our eternal state in Christ.

So that both good...singleness and marriage...good. Both portraying...both good, both portraying the gospel, and both singleness and marriage are God's gifts. So, when Paul talks about marriage, he says in 1 Corinthians 7:7, "*I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, each of one kind and one of another.*" There is a lot of discussion about what Paul is saying here. It seems clear that God is saying that He gives a gift of singleness to some and a gift of marriage to others. I remember when I was in college, guys talked about the gift of singleness and everybody wanted to know if they had it. Most everybody talked about it like they didn't want it, and it's this Christmas gift that everyone wants to return. So, there is a lot of discussion about the "gift" of singleness. Some people think Paul is talking about a divine enabling, kind of like spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, but I think that kind of understanding does pose some problems and doesn't have as strong a foundation, because it leads to a subjective battle within a single's heart, wondering whether or not if it's God's will for them to stay single forever.

So, a 20 or 30-year-old looks at this short term. Prospects of marriage not showing up, and they begin to wonder, "Do I have the gift?" They start thinking, "Well, I have a desire to marry, a desire to have children, so I don't think I have the gift." Others say, "Well, I'm okay right now, so maybe I have the gift." The reality is, whether or not they feel like they have a gift, reality is that single is still single. Would a married person ever ask the question, "Do I have the gift of marriage?" No. Clearly they have been given a gift in marriage. Which is where Paul uses in Romans 6:23 the word "gift" to describe more of an objective status, and I think this more the picture.

Now, brothers that I love and respect would go kind of back and forth on this. Some on one side, some on the other, but it seems to me that if you are single at the moment, then God has given you a gift in your singleness, and if you are married in the moment, then God has given you a gift in your marriage, and so thank God for His gift and to maximize that gift.

The other danger here in this picture of some mysterious gift of singleness that few people want is this two-tiered picture of singleness. So, you have some people who are single who think they have the gift and are okay with that, and then you have other people who are single but don't really want the gift. I think John Stott sheds light on this when he says,

I have no doubt that there are some people who believe God has called them to be celibate and to commit themselves to celibacy for the rest of their lives. Personally I have real hesitations about the wisdom of that, because I'm not convinced that people know, say, in their early twenties, that God has called them to that. I personally believe more in the second alternative—that people discover [God's call] gradually and as the years pass begin to think that God is probably calling them not to marry.

The whole point of 1 Corinthians 7 is Paul is saying, "Be content. Be satisfied with whatever gift God has given you." This contentment involved deep trust in the sovereignty of God. He says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 7:20, 24, and 27...over and over and over again. "*Remain in the condition in which he was called.*" Remain in God. Don't miss it. The primary issue in 1 Corinthians 7 is not whether you are married or single, it's whether you are trusting in where God has you and that's it. Instead of a frenzy of people asking, "Should we get married? Should we divorce? Should we remarry?" Paul says, "Stop and trust that God has you where you are for the time being, and it's a gift you are where you are right now. So, trust in me."

Listen to Margaret Clarkston, a missionary, single missionary in her 60's:

Through no fault or choice of my own, I am unable to express my sexuality in the beauty and intimacy of Christian marriage, as God intended when he created me a sexual being in his own image. To seek to do this outside of marriage is, by the clear teaching of Scripture, to sin against God and against my own nature. As a committed Christian, then, I have no alternative but to live a life of voluntary celibacy. I must be chaste not only in body, but in mind and spirit as well. Since I am now in my 60's I think that my experience of what this means is valid. I want to go on record as having proved that for those who are committed to do God's will, his commands [this is a great one-liner] are His enablings... My whole being cries out continually for something I may not have. My whole life must be lived in the context of this never-ceasing tension. My professional life, my social life, my personal life, my Christian life—all are subject to its constant and powerful pull. As a Christian I have no

choice but to obey God, cost what it may. I must trust him to make it possible for me to honor him in my singleness. That this is possible, a mighty cloud of witnesses will join me to attest. Multitudes of single Christians in every age and circumstance have proved God's sufficiency in this matter. He has promised to meet our needs and he honors his Word. If we seek fulfillment in him, we shall find it. It may not be easy, but whoever said that Christian life was easy? The badge of Christ's discipleship was a cross. Why must I live my life alone? I do not know. But Jesus Christ is Lord of my life. I believe in the sovereignty of God, and I accept my singleness from his hand. He could have ordered my life otherwise, but he has not chosen to do so. As his child, I must trust his love and wisdom.

Trust in Him and, not only trust in God, but contentment is the deep enjoyment of the grace of God. That is what that word "gift" means. You don't need to worry or fear, "Do I have it? For how long?" This is the beauty of contentment, Philippians 4, 2 Corinthians 9. God gives gifts in singleness and marriage. Trust them and enjoy them as measures of His grace.

All right, final foundation here, fourth foundation. Both singleness and marriage are for God's glory. So both. Both present unique opportunities to glorify God, which means singleness has a purpose we must be careful not to waste. So, the challenge for all of us, whether single or married, is to make a success of the single-life if we are single, to make a success of the married-life if married. Both for the glory of God.

Gospel Celebration: Four Reasons to Delight in Singleness...

So, with those foundations, here are four reasons to delight in singleness based on 1 Corinthians 7. One: delight in singleness because the times we're in. Paul said in verse 26, "*I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is.*" We don't know exactly what he is referring to there in 1 Corinthians 7, but we do know that persecution was rampant in the first century. It was not easy to be a Christian. Torture of Christians was commonplace. Trials, suffering along the way, perversions, sexual perversion in Corinth was great. So, to Christians wondering what to do, Paul, actually, encourages them to remain single, and he said...and this is really the focal point of 1 Corinthians 7:29-30...Paul says, "We are looking forward to an eternal hope." "*This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short.*" "Keep things in perspective," Paul says. Even a marriage that lasts 50 years in this life is passing away, and there is coming a day, very soon...remember your life is a mist...there's coming a day when you will be at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, and you will be His bride. Even if you don't marry on this side of heaven, that is not the ultimate goal.

Jesus said marriage is only a shadow of what is to come, so we are working to advance the Kingdom which leads to the second reason to delight in singleness: delight in singleness because of the mission we're on. What is the urgency? Well, in light of persecution, perversion, focus is necessary. That's why Jesus said, in Matthew 19:10-12, to be eunuchs for the Kingdom. Yes, marriage is good, but singleness is good for other reasons. We are living for an eternal heritage. We saw in Genesis 1:28, "*be fruitful and multiply...*" We've seen in the New Testament, "*make disciples of all nations,*" (Matthew 28:19). That's how the Kingdom of God expands. So, may this be our all-consuming desire and passion. As married couples: yes. As singles: yes. Particularly, as singles, follow in the footsteps of Paul and Lydia in the New Testament. Thomas Aquinas, Joan of Arc, Thomas a Kempis, Francis Asbury, Amy Carmichael, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Stott. Even C. S. Lewis was a bachelor for most of his life until he married at age 57. Rhena Taylor, a single missionary in Kenya wrote:

Being single has meant that I am free to take risks that I might not take were I a mother of a family dependent on me. Being single has given me freedom to move around the world without having to pack up a household first. And this freedom has brought to me moments that I would not trade for anything else this side of eternity.

Similar quote from Trevor Douglas: servant, a single missionary in the Philippines. God knows what He is doing in each of our lives. He knows what He is doing, and He has designed our lives for His glory, and we can trust Him in that.

Third reason we delight in singleness is because we want to be undistracted in our affections, which is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35. He is saying to single men and women, "There is no distraction when it comes to your affections. Take advantage of that. Take advantage of that."

Now, I want to be careful with what we are about to dive into, but this is just so important. Not just in 1 Corinthians 7, but all over Scripture, Paul encourages singles...and this is right before this in 1 Corinthians 6...and married people as well, particularly in light of sexual desire, we guard against unholy sexual desires. Flee from sexual immorality. Flee! Flee! So, in a world where singles are encouraged at every level to...in thought and deed...engage in sexual desire, the Bible says: flee, flee, flee, flee.

Do not buy the lie that sexual expression is necessary for ultimate fulfillment in life. Come back to Christ. Perfect, total fulfillment. Single, as well as others in the New Testament, so guard against, we guard against unholy sexual desires and guard against unholy selfish desires. Meaning, in light of the fact that you are not distracted by a spouse...in a sense, your affections not distracted...make sure that you do not transfer that over in unhealthy ways. Stott said, "Apart from sexual temptation, the greatest danger which I think we face [as singles] is self-centeredness. We may live alone and have total freedom to plan our own schedule, with nobody else to modify it or even give us advice. If we are not careful, we may find the whole world revolving around ourselves."

John Piper said,

Today singleness is cherished by many because it brings maximum freedom for self-realization. You pull your own strings. No one cramps your style. But Paul cherished his singleness because it put him utterly at the disposal of the Lord Jesus... The contemporary mood promotes singleness (but not chastity) because it frees from slavery. Paul promotes singleness (and chastity) because it frees for slavery—namely slavery to Christ.

Undistracted affections for Christ, which leads to the final reason to delight in singleness...because we want to be undivided in our devotion. "*Undivided devotion to the Lord*," 1 Corinthians 7:35. John Stott said, "Single people experience the great joy of being able to devote themselves, with concentration and without distraction, to the work of the Lord." So, we guard against unholy sin, selfishness and sexual desires. We give ourselves wholly to a single desire: to use God's great gift for God's great glory among the nations. Elisabeth Elliot said, "My most earnest of all pleas to singles is abandonment of the self, surrender to Christ of all unfulfilled longings, an unequivocal willingness to receive whatever God assigns, and a determination to practice the sacrificial principle of Isaiah 58:10-11. Life becomes not only far simpler, but surprisingly joyful and free." I put Isaiah 58 there. The gospel and singleness.

GOD'S DESIGN

The Gospel and the Widow

Gospel Foundations...

Okay, keep flying. The gospel and the widow. The gospel and the widow. God places high priority on care for the orphan and for the widow. James 1:27, "*visit orphans and widows.*" So, gospel foundations all over Scripture. Care of the Father for the widow. He cares for the widow, all over all these verses. See the compassion of the Son for the widow, whether it is the widow at Nain in Luke 7:11-17. He is warning the Scribes and the Pharisees, in commendation of the widow putting her offering in in Mark 12:38-44. Even His care for Mary in John 19:25-27. See the concern of the church for the widow in Acts 6, a picture of Tabitha and the widows in Acts 9.

Gospel Instructions...

So, here are the instructions, and what you have in 1 Timothy 5, we are not going to read through that passage, but I am going to sum it up here, and you can go back and read through the passage. Biblical instruction to the church is clear. Paul says...the Bible says...honor destitute widows through support.

I put a quote here from Bruce Winter that helps you kind of get a little glimpse into first century culture in Ephesus where Paul was writing this letter, 1 Timothy. Paul doesn't say anybody who's a widow, care for them in this way. Instead, he actually puts qualifiers on which widows should be cared for. He said they must be devoid of relatives. "*But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God,*" (1 Timothy 5:4). So, sons and daughters are intended to support their parents and grandparents. This pleases God, this demonstrates the gospel. "*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever,*" (1 Timothy 5:8). It's impossible for a Christian not to care for the own members of his household.

It pleases God, demonstrates the gospel, and this relieves the church, 1 Timothy 5:16. The church should not be burdened with that, so they may care for those who are truly widows. So, families take precedence here whenever possible. Church is not intended to be first line of defense for widows; second line of defense. Family first.

So, they must be devoid of relatives, and then they must be dependent on God; they set their hope in God, 1 Timothy 5:5, trusting in Him much like the widow in 1 Kings 17. They must be dependent on God, and they must be devoted to prayer. She says, Paul says, "*...continues in supplications and prayers night and day,*" 1 Timothy 5:5. Not self-indulgent but Christ-centered. The picture is wonderful here, picture of Christian widows with a unique devotion to prayer and ministry of prayer.

You can't help but think about Anna in Luke 2:36-37. Widowed: "*She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.*" I read a quote from Susan Hunt that just seemed so applicable here. She said,

It seems to me that widows have entered into a dimension of dependence on God that prepares them for the ministry of intercessory prayer. The widow's

mite was recognized and commended by Jesus because “she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on” (Mark 12:44). Perhaps the widow’s “might” is most mighty when these women band together as helper-defenders in intercessory prayer. Older women who do not have the daily responsibilities of jobs are another power source for intercessory prayer.

That’s the picture here. So, support widows who are devoid of relatives and dependent on God. Then, he talks about enlisting older widows for service. That’s where he talks about in the second part of the section of widows in 1 Timothy 5...and he gives qualifications for those who are enlisted: they must be mature women; they must have been faithful wives; they must care for children; they must be hospitable hosts; they must be humble servants; they must be unselfish; they must be kind, devoted to good works.

Then, he encourages younger widows to marry in 1 Timothy 5:11-15. There was evidently a problem in Ephesus with younger widows who were being encouraged not to marry by false teachers, and as a result, were causing disruption in the church. So Paul says...he is addressing a specific circumstance here...he says they must avoid laziness, which we see in all Scripture, and must abhor gossip, which also is all over Scripture. So, the whole picture in 1 Timothy 5 is the gospel compelling families to care for their relatives. In the words of John Calvin, “Before the church has to carry the burden, let the children do their duty.” Also, the gospel compels churches to care for the widows, particularly, those who do not have anyone to care for them. That is provision from God.

All right, that was a speed-round. There are resources on the [Radical] [website](#) if you want to dive deeper into that. I hate to gloss over anything quickly here, but you look up 1 Timothy 5, we dove into that whole passage there in depth as a church.

MAN’S DISTORTION **The Gospel and Divorce**

All right, let’s do this, and then we will take a break. The gospel and divorce, and so, we are looking at man’s distortions now, and obviously, this is heavy for many, many people. I doubt that there are many people all across the place tonight, here and around the world, who have not, in some way, been affected by divorce in their family, or near to their family. So, I want...I want to be careful to address this with gravity for anybody who is considering divorce, and with tenderness for those of you who have wounds from divorce. So, I pray that the Word will do that. There are three passages: 1 Corinthians 7, Matthew 19, and then Deuteronomy 24. Let’s read them quickly.

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): 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. To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who 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. 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. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the

brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace (1 Corinthians 7:10-15).

Then, you go to Matthew 19:3-12. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul quotes from Jesus in the beginning there, and he is quoting from here, it's parallel to Luke 16 and Mark 10:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.

Then, you've got Deuteronomy 24, which is the passage that conversation is referring to in Matthew 19:

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor [so, this is what God said in the Old Testament] in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Divorce and the Church...

Then, you have Genesis 2 there. So, how do we understand the Word of God there? I want us to start by making just a couple of statements about divorce and the church. I think that in too many cases, we have insulated ourselves...depth of teaching, void of teaching...in the church on divorce. We have isolated each other. As a result of a lack of teaching of divorce, we don't know how to relate biblically to friends and family members who are considering divorce, who have been divorced.

So, what do you say to a Christian who is contemplating divorce? All this leads to the third conclusion that concerns me: we have ignored the problem. We prefer not to talk about it, not to deal with it, and that is a mistake. It is wrong, brothers and sisters, when Christians are running to the courts when they should be running to the church to talk about divorce. If a Christian today is contemplating divorce, the first thing they often do is to hire a divorce lawyer, go to divorce court. That is wrong. Unbiblical. The Bible is clear on this.

Look at 1 Corinthians 6. Paul is shocked that believers are taking one another to court. God forbids a Christian husband to take a Christian wife, or a Christian wife to take a Christian husband, to court. The Bible sets up other avenues in Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5 to handle disputes among believers.

I am not saying that all judges and lawyers are bad; that's not the point. The point is God has set up a process in His church for settling disputes with one another, and we need to start, when it comes to marital struggles, with running to the church not the courts. We need to...we need to do this with one another. We, in the church, can't sit back and watch the state take over the institution of marriage in such a way that the church is hardly involved at all. That's wrong, and it needs to change. We certainly shouldn't be letting a pagan judge or pagan lawyers determine the fate of our families. Paul says, and very clearly, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, we are discrediting the testimony of the church when they can be handled within the church, and we are disgracing the name of Christ. What are we saying to an increasingly godless court system when half the cases they are dealing with are taking place between supposed Christians?

My goal...I don't want to harp unnecessarily on lawyers or court officials, but I will say this based on what we are looking at...what we are about to look at...if you build your life and your business and your industry around making divorce cheap and easy, then you scorn the design of God and the glory of Christ in marriage. You are accountable to God for that, and I would urge you to repent and seek His forgiveness before it's too late.

So, what should the church do? Here is what we should do. We should comfort one another with love, bear one another's burdens. Not isolate each other but be with each other; stand beside each other, and while we do that, confront one another in truth. We are careful to comfort. We don't comfort with falsehood; that's no comfort at all. We communicate Scripture truth. We don't say what feels best in that circumstance; we say what God has said about divorce. So, we want to do both: comfort, confront; love, truth. Truth in love.

Divorce and God...

So, what does God say about divorce? First and foremost, God created marriage. We have seen this tonight. God created marriage. Marriage is defined by God. Wise words from Jay Adams there,

If marriage were of human origin, then human beings would have a right to set it aside. But since God instituted marriage, only He has the right to do so. Marriage as an institution (which includes individual marriages, of course) is subject to the rules and regulations set down by God. Individuals may marry, be divorced and be remarried only if, when and how He says they may without sinning. The state has been given the task of keeping orderly records, etc., but it has no right (or competence) to determine the rules for marriage and for divorce; that prerogative is God's.

Similarly, you and I don't have the right to determine the rules for marriage and divorce: God does. Marriage is a covenant under God. He is a covenant-keeping God, and marriage is intended to reflect His covenant love. We have talked about this. Marriage is a demonstration to the world of Christ's covenant with His people. Divorce is not good because Christ will never divorce His people. "*What God has joined together, let not man separate*" (Matthew 19:6). So, God created marriage.

Second: God hates divorce, Malachi 2:15-16. He hates the causes of divorce; divorce is always a result of sin. Divorce was not a part of God's original design; it's always a result of sin. That is the whole point of Deuteronomy 24. That's why Jesus alludes to that in Matthew 19:8. He says, "Moses permitted you to divorce because your hearts were hard." It is always a result of sin in marriage...always.

Divorce is also almost always sinful. I say "almost always" because we are about to see in Matthew and 1 Corinthians that God allows divorce in certain circumstances. In those situations, divorce itself is not necessarily sinful, but divorce is, oftentimes, sought in ways that are not allowed in Scripture, and so many, many, many times is sinful in and of itself. God hates the causes of divorce, and God hates the consequences of divorce.

You look at Malachi 2:13-16, and you see that divorce negatively affects physical offspring. Divorce affects kids, and I want to be really careful because I want...I want to speak strongly here to moms and dads who are considering divorce and buying into the lie that this will be better for your kids when there will be consequences for kids. I want to speak tenderly here because some of you have grown up in broken homes, and I don't want to heap more on you, but the picture is God knows what He is talking about when He says, "Let's not rip apart that which I have joined together."

So, divorce negatively affects physical offspring, and divorce negatively affects spiritual offspring. The effects of divorce on the betrayal of Christ and the world are real. We hinder the advancement of the gospel in divorce, because we lie about Christ's relationship to His church.

So, God created marriage, hates divorce, and then God regulates divorce. Divorce was not a part of His plan, and in that sense...in that sense, God never willed divorce, but the picture we see in Deuteronomy 24, Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 is the Bible's acknowledgement that divorce is a reality, so God gives these regulations. So, what you've got are two basic biblical grounds for divorce: one in 1 Corinthians 7 and one in Matthew 19. Even the one in Matthew 19, some scholars have debated, because you look at the parallel passages in Mark and Luke, and they don't include this exception clause, but what you've got here...

We will start with...we'll start with one ground for divorce among believers and that ground for divorce would be adultery. Matthew 19 taught about two Christians...people in Matthew 19 were asking about Deuteronomy 24. They talked about can you divorce somebody for finding something indecent about her, and there were different kinds of rules and regulations that people were trying to follow based on that picture in Deuteronomy 24. A lot of the ways that that had been skewed, and so Jesus brings it down to this one exception. He says, in adultery, "*Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery*" (Matthew 19:9). The word he uses for "sexual immorality" there is "*pornea*" from which we get "pornography," and the picture is sexual sin that breaks the covenant of marriage. Adultery is grounds for divorce. It is grievous sin, and in the Old Testament, we see was punishable by death. Here in the New Testament, we see Jesus talking about how it is permissible to divorce. Divorce in this situation, Jesus said, is possible. Divorce is possible in this situation, which is where we begin to see some of the implications of the gospel to where divorce in Scripture, because in the gospel, sin is not the end of the story.

In the Old Testament, adultery comes, there's no question: immediate divorce or death. With the gospel there is hope. Divorce between believers is not desirable. What you see in Matthew 19, this is possible, but it is not mandated. There is a redemptive approach here to conflict in marriage. As followers of Christ, we are not looking for reasons to divorce, and

that is exactly what the crowd was doing in Matthew 19; they were looking for reasons to divorce, and Jesus looks at them and says, "It's not required even then." Divorce between believers...we are not looking for a reason to divorce. Divorce between believers is possible in a situation, but it is not inevitable. This is the radical, who in Matthew 18 said, "If a brother sins against you seven times in a day, even comes back to you and says over and over to you, 'I am sorry, I repent,' forgive him. Forgive him."

I cannot imagine the pain of a spouse committing adultery. Nor, obviously, do I want to imagine. So, I am not presuming to know what it is like to be in your shoes, but I would...I would simply urge you to see the power of the gospel in your heart and, in the process, look for reconciliation to occur. It's what the New Testament, what the gospel, is after. So, there is allowance for divorce in such a situation, but it doesn't mean it has to happen, or it is inevitable. We are not looking for reason to divorce; we are looking, longing, praying, working, and hoping for reconciliation to occur. That is the ground for divorce among believers...adultery.

Then, you get to 1 Corinthians 7, and Paul addresses a situation between a believer and an unbeliever. One ground for divorce there: abandonment. Basically, what Paul says is, if it's possible for you to continue living with your unbelieving husband or wife, then do so and love them in a way that shows Christ. Again, the picture here is reconciliation, but Paul acknowledges there may be times when an unbelieving spouse insists on divorce and abandons, leaves. In such situations, divorce is not just possible; Paul says divorce is preferable in that situation. It's a passive imperative in verse 15..."let him go, let him do so." So, those are the two grounds for biblical divorce: adultery and abandonment.

Now, you will notice that that's a pretty narrow list right there. I know a lot of other things we begin to wonder. "Well, what about this or what about this or what about this?" I want to encourage you especially...let's take abuse for example. Though that is not listed here, that doesn't mean, "Okay, you're supposed to live in abuse in a marriage." This means, if a brother in Christ is abusing you, then take it to the church. I joked earlier about taking stout elders outside, but the picture is there are processes where that needs to be handled in the church; where that brother needs to be confronted in his sin. First by a couple, then by more, then by the church. Calling him, and then casting him out if he continues, and you don't need to...obviously, don't need to be in a situation, any situation, where you are in danger before your husband or wife for that matter. So, I want to encourage you as we...as you think through this in your life, think through this alongside pastors and elders who know the Word, and who will shepherd you through that. So, I don't want to sound simplistic in flying through this tonight.

What about remarriage? Remarriage is biblically permissible only after biblical grounds for divorce. I have put another resource in the back of your notes here on this because there are some brothers that I respect greatly that would not even go this far. They say remarriage is never biblical or permissible, but it seems to me, based on the picture in Matthew 5, Mark 10, that biblically, remarriage is possible only after biblical marriage...biblical grounds for divorce. So, if there's...if someone has divorced on one of those biblical exceptions, those biblical grounds, then it would be possible for them to remarry.

So, God created marriage. He hates divorce. He regulates divorce. Then, finally, God redeems divorce. Particularly, to those who have been divorced, I want to speak especially to you right here, because I want you to see that Jesus has made a covenant with you that will never ever be broken. You have an Eternal Husband who is always forgiving. You have an Eternal Husband who loves you, cares for you, redeems you fully and completely.

Strengthens you, sustains you, provides for you, and He is always forgiving, and He is always faithful. He is faithful. He will never commit adultery against you, and He will never abandon you. He is with you always to the end of the age. No matter what happens in this world, Jesus will never forsake His bride. Never!

Divorce and the Gospel...

So what does this mean for our lives? This should be, I think...six general exhortations here. First, if you are single, just like we talked about: maximize your singleness to advance the gospel. If you are married, love your spouse in a way that portrays the gospel. Follow Ephesians 5. Follow Ephesians 5. If you are considering divorce, if you are here tonight, part of this tonight and considering divorce, remember the preciousness of the gospel and the power of God. Look: do you have biblical grounds for divorce? If you do not, how can you work in this alongside brothers and sisters helping you in the church? Even if you do have biblical grounds for divorce, is reconciliation possible? Is restoration possible based on the preciousness of the gospel and the power of God? This is where we need the gospel in our marriages.

If you are divorced for a biblical reason, rest in the gospel, in your singleness or possibly in a future marriage. Again, some people would say, don't remarry; but if you are divorced on biblical grounds then, obviously, in one sense, yes, rest in your singleness, and then if He grants you continued singleness, enjoy that. If He leads you to marry, I pray that the power of the gospel...you would display the love of Christ for His church in your future marriage. If you are divorced for an unbiblical reason, and you are single, repent and rely on the gospel to glorify Christ as you stay single. In other words, do not marry again, Scripture says. If you are divorced for an unbiblical reason and married, what do you do then? In other words, if you are remarried after an unbiblical divorce, I encourage you to repent and reflect the gospel in your current marriage. Scripture nowhere would indicate that you need to break another covenant marriage by divorcing again. Instead, Scripture calls you to magnify Christ in the marriage you have now. A heavy word, but I trust a good word.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: Radical.net