

“Discerning God’s Will Regarding Marriage”

1 Corinthians 7:13-14; 13:4-7

Ephesians 5:21-6:1-4

Rev. Edward D. Seely, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

- A. Let us pray. Precious Holy Spirit, as we **read and reflect** on the Word you inspired and guided the writers of old to inscribe, we pray that you illuminate our hearts and minds, so that we may understand and apply your Word to our lives, and thereby have the marriage you would have us have, that will please you, honor you, and point to the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and his love and power, in and through our lives. AMEN.
- B. As we consider God’s will pertaining to marriage, which is the subject I’ve been asked to address in this sermon, let us first examine some of the texts that indicate his will as to whom he would have us marry, a potential spouse, and then those Bible passages that pertain to his will for those of us who are already married.
1. First, what is God’s will leading up to marriage?
 - a. Throughout God’s Word we see him commanding his believers to marry only fellow believers in the Lord. Thus, from a New Testament perspective, that means your intended spouse is a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ as his or her only Savior and Lord. See the following passages for example.
 - 1) We see God’s command to marry only a fellow believer in such passages as these:
 - a) Genesis 28:1. “So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: ‘Do not marry a Canaanite woman.’” (For the context of this passage see 27:42-28:1; cf. 26:34-35)
 - b) Exodus 34:15-16. “Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. ¹⁶And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.”
 - c) Deuteronomy 7:1-6. “When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations--the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven

nations larger and stronger than you-- ²and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. ³Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. ⁵This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. ⁶For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”

- 1- To understand these verses, we have to remember who we, God’s people, are. As believers in Christ Jesus, we are heirs of the descendants of Abraham, and part of his everlasting covenant with God that has been renewed in Christ, as Paul explains in Galatians 3:26-29.
 - See especially 3:29. “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”
- 2- Here in Deuteronomy 7:6 is the key principle: “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you” to do a very important work for him in his plan to save the world. The unbelievers want no part of it, and God’s love will not permit anyone to interfere and pull his people off task.
- 3- If God permitted his people to marry unbelievers, they would cease to be his people, and his plan of salvation for the world, including us many centuries later, would be destroyed. **It is due to his great love for his people, in that time, now, and in the future, that he told his Old Testament people to do what he did at that point in time; it is not to be done again. Now, that is no longer necessary.**
- d) Ezra 9:1-2. “After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, ‘The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. ²They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.’” (Precisely what God said would occur! See also 9:3-10:44)

- e) Nehemiah 10:29-30. "...an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord. ³⁰ 'We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.'"
 - f) Malachi 2:11. "Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god."
 - g) 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. See especially, ¹⁴"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"
 - h) 1 Corinthians 7:39. "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." The same is true for the man if his wife dies.
- 2) So, it's clear in the Bible that God's will is that we only marry fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The next question, of course, is how can you know for sure whether someone is a believer?
- a) Some passages in God's Word tell us.
 - 1- John 3:16 NASB. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."
 - 2- Romans 10:9. "...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
 - 3- James 2:26. "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."
 - b) The preceding verses are examples of Bible texts that succinctly formulate the most basic beliefs necessary to profess about Jesus Christ and the redemption, the salvation, he came to bring. The great creeds of the historic worldwide Christian church are also helpful, such as the Apostles' Creed and the more widely used Nicene Creed in discerning whether someone has a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and the essential beliefs of the Christian faith.
 - 1- But people often lie. Many men, especially when they want a girl to marry them, will tell her anything they think she wants to hear, in order to

get her to agree to marry them. How can she tell if they are telling the truth?

- 2- The key to telling whether a person is a genuine believer, is the same principle that is most effectively used in other situations: it is known as track record, i.e., do his actions **OVER TIME** match his words?
 - a- Throughout the Bible, some of God's strongest condemnations involve hypocrisy, where people say one thing but do the opposite.
 - b- To tell if a person is genuine and trustworthy, watch him (or her) **over time** to see if he acts in accord with his words.
 - 1] For example, if a man tells a girl he is a Christian, he should want to go to church to worship God each week. (E.g., Hebrews 10:25. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.")
 - 2] Therefore, look at his response to your request to attend worship weekly. Does he willingly go with you? Is he always ready to go on time? Does he go each week? Do his verbal and nonverbal actions communicate a positive affect, even joy, in having worshiped with you? Is he willing to give an offering?
 - 3] Or, do you have to drag him to the church "kicking and screaming?" Does he frequently not want to go and offer excuses for why he can't attend? Does he complain about many things, such as the worship service, the sermon, the people, etc.? Is he opposed to giving an offering, much less tithing?

- 3) Now, what about in cases of arranged marriages where a Christian's parents, or the matchmaker, are not Christian?
 - a) In accord with God's Word, a believer can say to his or her parents and/or the matchmaker, "I am a Christian and I must obey God's Word. In his Word one of his commandments is to 'Honor your father and your mother.' Therefore, I will honor you by considering the person you want me to marry, but I must tell you that God clearly says in his Word, that I must only marry a fellow believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ."
 - b) Then use the next year or so to explain to this potential spouse that you are a Christian and can marry only another believer in and follower of Jesus Christ. Explain the Gospel of Christ to him or her and use this time to witness for Jesus. You have an exceptional opportunity to do so. Follow the principles in

these texts, *and determine the genuineness of words by track record over time.*

- c) If this person does profess and demonstrate in behavior a genuine faith in Jesus Christ as his or her only Savior and Lord, you can then decide if you would like to marry him or her.
 - d) If, however, it becomes clear that he or she will not believe in and follow Christ, or for some other reason you do not want to marry this person, you can then say this to your parents: “In obedience to God’s Word and will, I honored you by carefully considering the man (or woman) you brought to me. However, since he (or she) will not become a fellow believer in and follower of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I must also obey God and not marry someone who is an unbeliever. Please bring me someone else.
- 4) **If your spouse is not in Christ, how can you ever trust he or she will be faithful to God and to you? How can you have any assurance that he or she will maintain his or her vow to God and to you to “forsake every other and keep to you only as long as you both shall live?”**
- a) As an ordained pastor for half a century, I have counseled with many spouses who are Christians married to a non-Christian. The Christians have told me the same story again and again. It goes like this: “My husband/wife promised me before we were married that he/she would never interfere with my spiritual life including attending worship, but now that we’re married he/she always has other plans. When I want to go to worship he/she wants to go to the beach or to this place or that but never to church. He/she also puts pressure on me to not spend time in church.” Sometimes the pressure extends to hindering the Christian parent’s attempts to raise their children in the Lord. **This is wrong and is contrary to the will of God.**
 - b) Consequently, this presence of the non-Christian has had a significantly negative effect on the Christian and his or her children resulting in weak faith, lack of maturity in Christ, sanctification, and even in many cases leading the children to abandon the church and faith in Christ, **an eternally tragic development as a result of disobeying God’s Word.** Where the children have continued in the church with their believing parent, their spiritual development typically is hindered by the disbelief and disobedience of their unbelieving parent. They are also sad when they think about the eternal future of the parent outside of Christ if his or her unbelief continues to the end of life.
- 5) During the engagement period, as in all times outside marriage, it is clearly God’s will that the couple refrain from sexual relations until they are married. Many Bible texts reveal God’s will on this matter; just one will suffice, since we have limited time, and even if this were the only place in God’s Word where he made such a statement, that would be enough to indicate his will on the matter.

a) 1 Corinthians 6:9-20. “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God...

¹³...The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

b) The Greek word in verse nine, translated “sexually immoral” refers to sexual relations outside of marriage.

1- The rest of the passage explains why it is wrong to indulge in this practice, and it is linked with our being holy to Christ and united with him in the Holy Spirit.

2- Notice something very significant in this text about our bodies. In verse 19, Paul reveals that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit, where the Spirit dwells. When Paul says your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, he uses the special Greek word, *naos*, which refers to the holiest part of the temple, the sanctuary where God dwelt. Paul did not use the word, *hieron*, which referred to the whole temple complex with its buildings and courts.

3- Our sexual purity all has to do with our holy relationship to God who is not only holy, but holy, holy, holy—the Hebrew way of saying Most Holy—as God revealed himself in both the Old (Isaiah 6:3) and New Testaments. (Revelation 4:8) Remember, how he commanded Moses in Leviticus 19:2, “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'”

4- I've heard that the unbiblical practice of cohabitation, that is being widely done in the West, is now popular in China. Without the marriage commitment, and doing so in disobedience, defiance, and dishonoring of the Lord, such cohabiting relationships are not nearly as satisfying, are

counterproductive to the couple's well-being, and must be avoided for many other reasons that I've identified in an essay on that subject on the Marriage page of my Website, www.fromacorntoak12.com.

5- Therefore, those of us holy to the Lord, and belonging to him, must wait until marriage before trying to partake of the benefits God has reserved for that very special estate. I thank God frequently that my precious wife, Carol, and I followed his commands. He truly knows best.

- b. What is God's will, what should a Christian do if he or she has already married a non-Christian?
- 1) The apostle Paul speaks to this matter in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16. "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.
¹²To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.
¹⁵But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. ¹⁶How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?
 - 2) When Paul says in verse 10, "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord)...," he means that he is quoting a command of the Lord Jesus, when he was here on earth, that married couples must stay together. (See, e.g., Matthew 5:32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18)
 - 3) When Paul says in verse 12, "To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord)...," he means that he is not here quoting a direct command from Jesus. What Paul is saying is the Word of God, a Holy Spirit-inspired statement.
 - 4) The key to understanding these texts is in verse 14. The believing marriage partner is sanctified, set apart as holy and is growing in Christ-likeness in the covenant relationship with God. The believer's presence provides the means for any children also to be holy to God, to belong to God, and it puts the unbelieving partner in a position to hear the Gospel of Christ Jesus in the most optimum way possible that can facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit in enabling the unbeliever to have faith, thus bringing the unbeliever to the Lord.

2. Now, what is God's will in marriage? Up to this time, we've been looking at his Word pertaining to his will leading up to marriage. Now, we see God's guidance in many passages in the Bible, in particular in Ephesians 5: 21-33, for husbands and wives after the wedding and throughout their marriage.
 - a. How can a man best leave his parents and cleave to his wife, the two becoming one?
 - 1) The context of this passage should include 5:18, where the apostle Paul commands Christ followers to "be filled with the Spirit." The Greek verb form indicates that this filling is done continuously and repeatedly, not once for all; it is a command that we invite God to take control of us and shape us according to his will, that he guide and direct us; we are passive in the process; it is in the 2nd person plural: for the whole church, not just me privately. This means that we are filled with the Spirit together in Christ.
 - 2) Paul then proceeds in verses 19-21 to show how this filling with the Spirit occurs, through
 - a) "speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," (5:19)
 - b) "singing" (5:19)
 - c) "making music in your heart to the Lord" (5:19)
 - d) "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (5:20)
 - e) "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." (5:21)
 - f) All these practices are done in corporate Christian worship, at least once per week, and in the home. Can you see how such practices shape one's personality, including his or her spirit, to treat others, especially his or her spouse, in a Christ-like manner?
 - **How would you like to spend the rest of your life with a husband or wife who was filled with the Holy Spirit and who acted like Jesus?**
 - 3) Paul then draws on the relationship that Christ has with the church to explain God's will for how husbands and wives can have the most satisfying, fulfilling, enjoyable, and God-honoring marriage possible.
 - a) As Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the Savior, and as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord in everything. Someone has to be the leader, and in God's plan and in accord with the gifts he has given each gender, the marriage relationship will work best if carried out in accord with God's plan.

b) But, now notice carefully what the husband, whose leadership the wife is to acknowledge, must do to please the Lord, and his wife. He is to love his wife, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to make her holy. (5:25-26)

1- The word Paul uses for the love the husband is to do for his wife is *agapē*, the highest form of love, the love Christ demonstrated, and which Paul defines in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

- a- ⁴Love is patient,
- b- love is kind.
- c- It does not envy,
- d- it does not boast,
- e- it is not proud.
- f- ⁵It is not rude,
- g- it is not self-seeking,
- h- it is not easily angered,
- i- it keeps no record of wrongs.
- j- ⁶Love does not delight in evil
- k- but rejoices with the truth.
- l- ⁷It always protects,
- m- always trusts,
- n- always hopes,
- o- always perseveres.

2- I've often asked the ladies in the Bible study classes I've taught on this subject, "If your husband typically acted this self-sacrificial way, would you have any trouble having him be the leader in your home? Would it be hard to defer to his wish on a particular matter?" You know the unanimous answer I've received to those questions!

3- So, how do we help the husband function this way more and more?

- a- First of all, we need to begin with a believer, as we've seen.
- b- Then, we need to work at this believer being filled with the Spirit, as we also saw.
- c- He also needs to understand God's plan in creation, that "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." And, as we read in the next verse, this understanding has to include the awareness that this relationship

involves a profound mystery. (5:31-32) But one that is especially deeply satisfying and involves Christ and the church.

d- As the husband loves his wife, she helps him by giving him one of his greatest needs—respect—and in so doing motivates him to work harder at loving her—and in the process meeting one of her deepest needs—love. This Biblical reality has also been corroborated by careful contemporary scientific research.

b. How do you build a strong and loving relationship with the extended family?

- 1) Marriage also involves a relationship with both the husband's and wife's side of the family. Throughout human history and all over the world, multiple families related together have shared the same household.
- 2) The Bible indicates that the larger family should continue to be in relationship, though in a different way than when the husband and wife were growing up. The text before us says that "...a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." (5:31) They are a separate entity with a profoundly powerful connection.
- 3) But in God's sight they still have a significant relationship with their extended family, whom God has given responsibility.
 - a) Grandparents are to be involved in the spiritual nurture of their grandchildren. See, e.g., in Deuteronomy 4:9 where we read, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."
 - b) Recall also that God commands us in Ephesians 6:2-3, "'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—³that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'"
 - 1- Of course, this is one of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament.
 - 2- As such it will always be in effect (Matthew 5:17-18), but with some New Testament applications.
 - a- While there is no age limit on honoring our parents, i.e., the text does not say that we are to honor our father and mother only until we are 18, or 21, or some other age. We are to always honor them, though when we marry, the statement in 6:1 that children are to obey their

parents is modified, e.g., by 5:22 where the wife submits to her husband, who has left his parents and joined himself to his wife in the profound one flesh relationship, and **the husband is accountable to the Lord, not to his parents, as it was in the beginning; we know that when God says “honor your parents” that he does NOT mean ancestor worship, for ancestor worship is forbidden by the first commandments, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me... You shall not bow down to them or worship them....”** (Deuteronomy 5:6-9) The Lord held Adam accountable for Eve’s and his sin. It is essentially, mainly, his fault that sin has corrupted God’s creation, including human nature. (Romans 5:12-19) Even though Eve ate the forbidden fruit first, he could have and should have grabbed her arm and stopped her from disobeying God.

- b- Now, lest we be too hard on Adam and Eve, take note of the meaning of Adam’s name: The Hebrew word *adam*, means man in the generic sense, i.e., mankind, which indicates that if any of us were in his place at that time, we, too, would have done the same thing Adam did.
- c- Furthermore, the Biblical command to honor our parents is not at all the same as in other religions which perceive parents, especially after they die, as gods. As God says in the very first commandment, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³“You shall have no other gods before me.”” (Exodus 20:2-3)
- d- How, then, can the new couple entity relate to their in-laws in ways pleasing to God? And how can the in-laws, extended family, relate effectively to the new couple: Always follow, as Paul says, “the most excellent way,” (1 Corinthians 12:31) the practice of *agape*, the highest form of love, which, as we just saw, Paul says should be how the husband treats his wife. It should also be how the couple treats their in-laws, their extended family, how in Christ the extended family should treat the couple, and how all God’s people treat everyone.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

- Let us pray. Dear triune God, Father, only begotten Son Christ Jesus, and Holy Spirit, three in one, please bless each person here, according to all his or her needs. We pray that you work in our hearts and minds, and the hearts and minds of any future or current spouse you give, or have given, to your people in this blessed fellowship, so each person may have the marriage that you would have him or her have, and that throughout the rest of their lives these couples

may be and remain faithful to you and to each other; that they may support each other, overcoming with your all-sufficient help the challenges of life here on earth; and from your loving hand, may they experience that unparalleled joy and witness to your faithfulness that will please you, the couple themselves, any child or children you give them, your church, and many others, always in Jesus' precious name. AMEN.

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