

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

88.2 What Does the Bible Say About the Causes of Marital Unhappiness?

Part II

Scripture: I Corinthians 7:3-7; 12-24; 32-40

Many internal problems vexed the life of the Church of Christ at Corinth. The leaders of the congregation sought the wisdom of the Apostle Paul hoping his advice would ease the disorder in the fellowship. One such difficulty is given attention in chapter 7. A whole range of questions regarding the union of two people in marriage is going to be brought into focus, not the least of which was the fact that husbands and wives were leaving one another. (7:10-13) This should not have been the case among believers, but the facts of the matter proved otherwise. It is our purpose in this study to explore again some of the causes of marital difficulty.

Paul's words in verse 10, "...not I but the Lord" reflect upon the fact that what He is about to teach will not conflict with the instruction of Jesus on the matter. With that in mind, last week we turned to Matthew 19:3-9 and stressed the words of Christ concerning leaving and cleaving. One source of distraction in the marital relationship is the failure to leave one family in order to begin another. We have also thought about the failure to understand the purposes of marriage as outlined in Genesis 2:18-25. Affinity and diversity in marriage enable people to fulfill their lives in terms of companionship, love, home, children and in many other ways. There is the great potential for permanence which God has woven into our personalities and our diverse physical makeup's. Now let us consider other causes of conflict in this most intimate and demanding of all human adult relationships.

III. THE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY FAILURE: I Corinthians 7:12-17; II Corinthians 6:14

Experience has shown that we tend to marry people who are most like our selves. The more two people have in common, the more likely they are to be come acquainted in the first place. Having met, the more they discover they have in common, the more attracted they are to one another. There is a word for this

tendency it is **homogamy**. **Heterogamy**, on the other hand, is the attraction and marriage of dissimilar people.

Studies have shown that **homogamy** is overwhelmingly predominant over **heterogamy** and that if opposites do attract, it is only a temporary attraction and that opposites do not marry in significant numbers. It is nonsense to believe that the secret of finding a mate lies in selecting someone who is signally different in makeup. The point is that if you are a hyperactive person chances are your marriage will have greater potential if your mate is similarly inclined. All kinds of examples might be given, but research has shown the generalizations of the attraction of opposites to be mistaken.

I rather suppose that the Apostle Paul was not familiar with the theory of opposites being attracted to one another or with **homogamy** for that matter. There is a conviction, however, which he did have. He stated it very clearly in II Corinthians 6:14. *“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership, have righteousness with unrighteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?”* In I Corinthians 7:39; He is dealing with the question of a widows remarriage and does so with the words, *“...she is free to be married to whom she wishes, **only in the Lord.**”* It should be pointed out that this is not only an academic matter, it is a matter of obedience to the Lord. This is the revealed will of the Lord concerning marriage. This is the principle of the unequal yoke. Believers are to marry only believers. Once born people are different from twice born people. They are compared in Scripture to the difference which exists between light and darkness. (Ephesians 5:8) Paul wrote, *“for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light.”*

One of the important concepts in the Bible is the concept of the separation of people who know the living God. God has His people in the world and from the beginning it has been His desire that they be a separate people, that they be separated unto Himself. (Genesis 12:1; Leviticus 11:7;10; Deuteronomy 22:9-11; I Kings 13:21-24) Whenever God's people have refused to keep themselves separate from the world, the results have been tragic. (Genesis 4:25-26; 6:1-7; Joshua 7:24-26; I Kings 11:4-5; Nehemiah 13:23-27; II Corinthians 6:14-18) The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have a New Testament application. The Jew, circumcised in body, pictured a circumcision of heart which both Jew and Gentile alike must have if they are to stand before God to be accepted by Him. Christians are under no obligation to keep the ceremonial law concerning diet, the wearing of particular garments or the hitching of ox and ass together or the

sowing of the vineyard with diverse seed. This is the letter of the law and is not, as such, binding upon believers today. But the spiritual application which the Old Testament Jew was to have gleaned from those demands is binding upon New Testament believers. What is that spiritual lesson? It is that God's people are to be separate! Long before instruction came through Paul, the prophet Amos asked the searching question, "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" (Amos 3:3) This is certainly applicable to the union of marriage. Can two possibly walk together in life unless they are in agreement as to what life is all about? Unless they agree on what is imperative and is to take priority? Can two walk together unless they have their sights on the same goals and are facing the same direction? People have learned through bitter experience how important it is to share a common faith. When a believer marries a person who is outside of faith in Christ he or she is taking a step in the wrong direction, it is a step away from the Lord. Marriages ought to be made in heaven. The spiritual side of marriage is the most important because it goes to the essence of our being. People are ignorant of the fact that they can no more be rid of their spiritual natures than they can be rid of their bodies. Yes, it is important to be married emotionally, and physically, but it is equally important to be married spiritually. The most necessary spiritual preparation is conversion which occurs when both individuals give themselves unreservedly to Christ. This involves repentance and faith which mean essentially a whole different mind and attitude concerning life, people, and God. It is much more than mental assent, but a way of life in which people choose the same harness and give of themselves in a mutually agreeable way of life. Happiness in marriage is therefore, a matter of living Christ's way and being subject to His leading.

IV. FAILURE TO FEED LOVE: I CORINTHIANS 7:17-24

Paul does not mention love in these verses, but his concern is with the Christian life which is a life to be measured by love. It is Paul's view that when a person becomes a Christian he is not to think of forsaking old responsibilities or surroundings; rather, to think in terms of bringing new life and perspective to these things. A Gentile will remain a Gentile and a Jew will remain a Jew, a slave will remain a slave. Of course, in the world of the Corinthian Church the desire of a slave was one day to be free. Such a thing was possible by earning enough money to eventually deposit his purchase price in the temple of some god. The priest of the temple would in turn give this money to the slave's master making the slave the new property of the god of that temple. Paul writes in verse 23,

"You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men." Christians are people who have been purchased by Christ and are His property. Now it is very interesting to me that this teaching is given in a chapter which has to do with questions about marriage. I believe that the significance lies in the fact of relationships and the change Christ can bring to them. When we believe that we belong to Jesus than we believe that we ought to obey Him, and that is where love enters the picture.

Everyone has opinions and notions about love. Not all of these views fit what authorities are saying about love or what the Scriptures say. The people who read the Corinthian letter were familiar with two kinds of love. One they called "**eros**" which tended to be a sensual love. It is the orange squeezer brand of love with the emphasis on satisfying one's appetite with little concern for the fate of the orange. Erotic love seeks its own and if not fulfilled will turn to hate. It is that kind of love written about in Congreve's, **The Morning Bride**, Act III, Scene 8, "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned." Erotic love is demanding and possessive. It is love for what you can get.

But there is another kind of love. The difference between love and hate is that love is an irradiation. The concentration emerges from within to flow outward toward the recipient. Hate, on the other hand, concentrates for the most part upon its victim. Another kind of love, one introduced by the Gospel of Christ, was "**agape.**" This was not demanding and therefore could not be frustrated. It was outgoing, and inspired the giving of oneself to purposes beyond oneself. This is what Jesus had in mind when he said, *"He who loses his life shall find it."* (Matthew 10:39) Now Christ commands husbands to love their wives and wives to love their husbands. (He commands through Paul in Titus 2:4 and Ephesians 5:25). These are commands and as such are directed to our will rather than our hearts. It is a volitional matter more than it is emotional. The teaching is that while you may not always feel in love, you can always love nevertheless. Immediately someone is going to say that such a thing is impossible because we can't love someone without having a feeling for them. The reason this seems so difficult is because we are all the time equating love with the physical and the emotional. In I Corinthians 13 God tells us what love is and it is an operative thing more than it is contemplative. We know how it goes. Love suffereth long and is kind. Love envieth not. Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Love does not behave itself inappropriately, seeketh not its own, is not easily

provoked, thinketh no evil...and on it goes. Jesus commands us to love that way. He will help us to love that way. The God who loved the unlovely will help us to love others that way. In fact, He will love through us when we are willing to let Him. We will be amazed to see how the feeling will come to accompany these acts of love.

There are personal needs to be met in every marriage, they are deep and intense. But the satisfaction of these needs is not the measure of a lasting relationship in marriage for that would mean that to the degree the needs are satisfied, the marriage is sound. As soon as a better situation emerges on the horizon the partnership is in trouble. Love that involves a genuine concern for the welfare of the other party is the love that builds a strong and enduring marriage. The Lord enables us to make this a mutual concern. If we can love one another deeply enough to subordinate to the other's interests in obedience to Christ and through His strength than we have an unconditional kind of love which is able to change our relationship with our mate. What we need to do is to love the Lord supremely and He will feed the love He wants us to have and we want to have for our partner

**V. FAILURE TO KEEP DISAGREEMENTS IN THEIR PLACE:
I Corinthians 7:28**

Doubtless, when Paul wrote, *"Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you,"* he had in mind the pressures of living for the Lord and at the same time maintaining the needs of the home. It is not unlikely that differences of opinion will arise from time to time. Living under the same roof day after day and year after year, people are bound to get on each others nerves at times. Even Romeo and Juliet, had they lived long enough together, probably would have had their disagreements. The closer we live to someone the freer we become and the more vigorous the clash can be. Marriage forms the most intimate of human relationships and it would seem therefore, that disagreements are inescapable. We might even take the position that such incompatibility is normal. A new trend in marriage counseling approaches the family quarrel as neither good or bad. They are unavoidable and what we ought to do is make the most of them. What many people do not realize is that this kind of thinking arises out of the conception that man is an extension of the animal kingdom and in his quarrels is merely giving expression to those instincts. Two best sellers written by Konrad Lorenz and Robert Ardrey persuasively argue that every family turns into a battleground from time to time because we are born fighters, and because

we have chosen to live with someone, there is no reason to believe we will behave otherwise. So we come to think of constructive and destructive quarrels. Destructive quarrels are those which leave fewer assets than before. Constructive are those which relax the strain and which lead to a more complete understanding of issues, conditions and problems. This is all very interesting and may helpful to a certain extent but the Christian faith rejects flatly the naturalistic view of man and certainly cannot abide bickering within the family unit as being neither good nor bad. The Bible makes an ethical judgment on matters of selfishness, anger, jealousy, lovelessness and it decries this behavior as unbecoming to people who are Gods image bearers.

The Lord has a wonderful alternative to the modern naturalistic view. It is to be found in Himself. He is the most important person in the whole world. The reason is not because He equips people to face eternity one day, but because He enables them to face this day. Whether the problem is a stubborn disposition, a lack of self control, or whatever, Jesus is able to help us where we are at our worst. Marriage does not have to be a competitive affair, a kind of power struggle. Differences will lead to a solution when the lordship of Christ is established. Convictions and feelings can be fully expressed. Agreements can be reached through a compromise. Submission on the part of the wife allows her to retain her feelings, convictions and outlook and is a distinctive Godly discipline knowing her husband is accountable to the Lord for the leadership He gives. Disagreements in the Christian home should be marked by speedy reconciliation, forgiving and forgetting. Those who know Christ and receive His pardon should be able to live in this way while involved in the most delicate and personal of relationships.

VI. FAILURE TO BE WATCHFUL IN OUR DEVOTION:

I Corinthians 7:32-35

I Corinthians 7 is a study in realism. It has to do with marriage and the wisdom God is able to bring to the relationship people have in that union. People have felt that the man who wrote this chapter was opposed to marriage, but such a conclusion is not necessary when we realize some important features of a Biblical text. First, we realize that God has chosen to make us aware of His point of view on a given subject through a message in words which have been written. On the one hand, we have revelation. We are made aware of God's thoughts through words of certain men as revelation came to them. We are thus able to reach certain conclusions about various matters as these words have

meaning in our lives. There is a very real sense in which there is only one basic authoritative meaning for each text of Scripture. The Bible does not become the Word of God to us through our ability to give it meaning. It has its own meaning by virtue of the fact that words are important. Secondly, there is the matter of illumination. We are in control of the interpretation of the words we use. For this reason, while a Biblical text may have only one authoritative meaning, it may have many applications. These may not always hold to the truthfulness of the text. What God has said can be one thing, what we think He has said may be quite another. A Biblical text must become practical and this calls for interpretation and application, but the real issue of the times is the authority and meaning of the text as it was written. Now, Paul is given permission to say some things about marriage which may give the impression that He is against it. This, I say, is an inference read into the text and not explicitly taught by Paul at all. As I have said, because we have the right of applying our own meaning to words, we may want to look upon the words, "*Yet, I wish that all men were even as I myself am,*" (I Corinthians 7:7) in only one way. The truth of the text is that Paul felt the tension of divided loyalties in undistracted devotion to the Lord, (7:35) but that marriage is honorable because each man and woman has the gift of God for one purpose or another in the matter. The question of whether it is right to marry or wrong to marry is not the issue here, but an issue of expedience in devoting time and effort to the marriage partner thus causing the work of Christ to suffer. Paul concludes by saying, "*I think I also have the Spirit of God.*" This is not an expression of doubt that the Holy Spirit was guiding him, but an affirmation of the fact that he did have the Holy Spirit's leading in matters where no direct command had been given by Jesus. We assign an element of doubt to the word "think." It was not used by Paul in this way. If I were to ask you if you think you have the Holy Spirit in your heart you would answer by saying that you do. Of course you could only respond that way on the basis of what you think to be so. It is impossible to know anything without thinking.

When Paul speaks about writing by concession and not by command (7:6) he is not describing a contrast between Paul the apostle being motivated by the Holy Spirit and Paul the man being giving the right to give his opinion on the matter. In I Corinthians 14:37 he expressly declares that the things he has written to them are the Lord's commands. (See also I Thessalonians 4:15) The point of contrast alluded to here is between those matters upon which Christ directly spoke (Matthew 5:31; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12) and upon those by which He now

is going to speak through Paul. He has been given permission to reiterate what Christ has already commanded.

When Paul wrote to Ephesian Christians he recognized the potential for permanence in marriage by suggesting the union was like the relationship between Christ and His Church. In spite of this lofty parallel, he is not unmindful of the tensions involved in exercising devotion to the Lord and to one's mate at the same time. Opportunities abound for service to Christ. They often call for long hours and no little amount of effort. This is equally true of the desire we have to please a husband or wife. The whole point is that we must exercise **watchfulness** in our **godliness** and in our **humanness** lest neglect creep in to a relationship. We can neglect the Lord in carrying out the routine matters of family living and we can neglect the family as we become involved in the Lord's work. Not a few Christian homes have felt this tension.

The story of Mary and Martha recorded in Luke 10:38-42 illustrates this. In preparing for the Lord's visit Martha's conduct seemed quite reasonable, but it kept her from waiting upon the Lord in terms of what He had to offer her. We must learn to strike a balance so that both interests are served. We should never feel that home responsibilities are somewhat inferior to our more direct efforts for the Lord. If we fail at home we have not been all that successful in life's mission regardless of what we have done for humanity. It has been said that home is our greatest responsibility under God. In a broader way, whatever keeps us from spending enough time with the family can prove to be a very costly interest. If such be the case a review of priorities may be in order. Marriage is the broadest experience of earthly life. It gathers up so much of the total scheme of living that if we are not happy or unsatisfied in marriage there is little left to be happy about. It is possible to sublimate by throwing oneself into a career or some other interest and a little break in the clouds may appear, but it's for the most part a rather dismal horizon. To conclude, one reason for unhappiness in marriage is neglect of the family by way of other interests, people who do not "work at it" as the expression goes, have this grief.

VII. FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE THERE IS NO PLACE FOR A THIRD PARTY:

Matthew 19:6

No one has the right to separate what God has joined, whether it be civil magistrate or one with romantic intentions. The third party I have in mind is one who lures a husband away from his wife or a wife away from her husband.

Sometimes this third party is serious in fulfilling a selfish desire at any cost, while other times it is a matter out of hand by being unreasonably friendly or flirtatious. Whatever the case, marriages are weakened and destroyed by triangles and there can be no end of devastation visited upon the people involved. This is very common on the American scene. People begin to seek greener pastures when their marriage becomes stale, when the excitement of romantic experimentation looms before them.

No one is immune from the marriage triangle. It is a problem which has to do with pleasing one's own self, the appeal of the eye and the flesh. A person may fall into this snare without even realizing it. This kind of relationship is seldom planned. It begins so innocently and so harmlessly when one becomes involved and too familiar with a member of the opposite sex. Unwittingly, one thing leads to another. Let me say that no mere religiousness is strong enough medicine to remedy this ill. A formal Christianity will do little to preserve a marriage with these possibilities at hand. Chapters one and two of John's gospel tell about a wedding Jesus attended. This Jesus is described as the "*Word made flesh.*" In this passage the wonderful Christian faith is brought to the ground floor of human interest and desire to effect a remarkable success. No marriage therapy is very profound or new. It is a matter of living marriage the Christian way. People who are thoroughly committed to Christ and who guide their lives by Him have a lot going for them in marriage. It is a very great tragedy more do not realize what Jesus can do.

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October 17, 1976

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