

You Can Work it Out

I. He Who Finds a Wife Finds a Good Thing

Proverbs 18:22:

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.

There are many Christians today saying to themselves, “Yah, I found a wife alright, but she sure wasn’t so great. That verse about finding a wife being a good thing can’t be right because I found a wife and she was everything *but a good thing!*” But this verse doesn’t mean to find any available woman, get married, and you’re guaranteed to have a good thing. The Hebrew actually says, “Whoso finds a good wife, finds a good thing; and not only obtains the favor of the Lord, he also obtains the grace of God. In fact, a good wife is as much a grace gift as the new birth, God’s Word, the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and the ministry are grace gifts.

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. An addendum to this verse in the Septuagint says, “He that divorces his wife, divorces a blessing and takes an unchaste and stupid woman to his bosom.”

This verse is making an important point. If you’ve found a good wife, you’ve found the grace of God. But if you get rid of a good wife, you’ll never have a wife as good as the one you used to have. So, if you’ve got a good one, hang on to her!

II. A Personal Testimony

My wife and I were born and raised in Tulsa. We met in church and dated for a year. We didn’t know much about marriage before we were married. We had the crazy idea that after we were married, everything would just come naturally. The husband would automatically know how to be the head of the house. The wife would automatically know how to submit to her husband. Love would just naturally grow. We would have children and automatically know how to raise them. Boy, were we ever in for a surprise!

I had no idea what submission was when we married. I confused submission with giving my wife commands. I kept saying, “Submit! Submit!” and she wouldn’t respond the way I wanted. My attitude was “Submit, woman!” not realizing submission in marriage was really a response to love expressed toward the wife by the husband. I’m a good

delegator, so I just delegated everything to my wife—the checkbook, the house, the kids and expected her to take care of it all never considering her needs. Then when my needs would arise, I thought I could just come home, say a few nice words, touch her in the right way and have my needs fulfilled. I treated her like a slot machine—put a coin in, pull the handle and get whatever I wanted. I couldn't figure out why she wasn't responding to me. Yet, after I was gratified sexually, I would let her go back to taking care of things and act almost as though she didn't exist until the next time I needed gratification. I soon learned you don't treat a woman this way. We argued. We threw words back and forth. We threw shoes back and forth. We threw lots of things back and forth. Things just progressively got worse and worse. I knew God had called me to the ministry but I failed to see that my wife was as much a grace gift to me as my ministry. Ministry was first place in my life and everything else fell in line behind my ministry, including my wife. There were times I just tuned her out. She would talk to me and I wouldn't hear a thing she was saying. I was off in my own world studying the Bible or watching television. She wasn't responding to me the way I wanted so I thought tuning her out would be a good way to get back at her. I was an instructor at Rhema at the time. I would come home and say, "Guess what someone told me today" and she would respond, "I told you the same thing weeks ago!" My answer would be, "Yes, but this is brother so and so!" Because of the way I was treating her, my wife began to feel like all I needed was someone to take care of my natural needs and gratify me sexually. I couldn't figure out why my wife didn't just automatically love me. I provided her a home, food, and a car. What more could she want? Things escalated until we had reached a point where we were ready to divorce. We were at a meeting in Memphis, Tennessee and one night in our hotel room, my wife decided she was going to leave the meeting early and fly home. We had decided to divorce. She would take one of the children and I would take the other. But every time she would go to the door to leave, she couldn't go through with it. Something on the inside was keeping us from walking away from each other. We knew way down on the inside that God had put us together, but we had so much unforgiveness and pride we wouldn't listen to one another. We were essentially living in the same house but going in two separate directions. It seemed to us there was no solution. At the time this was happening, the pastor of Grace Fellowship was Dr. Ken Stewart. It turned out he was coming the next day to be at the same meeting I was in. I told my wife, "I don't know what else to do. I'm going to call Ken." We had never confided in him as our pastor but had decided we would call him. When I got ready to dial the phone Loretta said, "No, I don't want to talk to him because he'll know all of our secrets. Then when we come to church, everyone will look at us and think, 'I know what's going on in their lives.'" Satan will use anything to keep us from receiving help. I insisted on calling. I explained to Dr. Stewart, "Loretta is ready to walk out the door. We are ready to give up. We've tried and tried in our own

strength. There's nothing left to do except divorce. She's ready to leave right now and you're the only one I can think of to talk to." He said, "Ask her to hang on one more day." So, we sweated it out for one more day. We talked until three o'clock in the morning with Dr. Stewart and reached a point where neither of us wanted to change unless the other one changed first. We each had a list of demands for the other one. Dr. Stewart explained to us that love doesn't take. Love gives. That night I finally woke up to the fact that you cannot change another person. You can only change yourself. I couldn't change my wife. I had tried to for ten years and had failed. And she couldn't change me. We made up our minds that night we were no longer going to compete to change each other. Instead, we were going to compete to out-love each other. We were going to concentrate on changing ourselves. That is when things really began to turn around. It didn't change over night. The words and shoes still flew from time to time, but this was definitely the turning point in our relationship.

When the founding pastor of Grace Fellowship left for the mission field, I was chosen as the interim pastor. God had shown Loretta and me that I would be the pastor. We would talk about it. God had put it on our hearts three years before it ever happened. But when I stepped in as interim pastor, nothing seemed to go right. Those were the six worst weeks of my life! I would teach and it seemed like the anointing would just bounce right back in my face. I would study and sense the anointing, but the minute I stepped in the pulpit it seemed like the anointing was gone. I began to blame the congregation thinking they were too carnal. I thought if they would just get spiritual, I could preach to them! But at the same time, our home life was a wreck. We talked at home, "How could God possibly make us the pastor if we can't even get along at home? How can we tell others how to live successfully when we can't even do it ourselves?" After six weeks as interim pastor, God spoke to me and said, "You're not the pastor. Ken Stewart is the pastor." So I went to lunch with him and said, "I'm not the pastor, you are." He said, "That's right. God spoke to me a few weeks ago. Donna and I agreed last night that God would tell you that we're the pastor and you're not." I said, "Praise God! This has been the worst six weeks of my life. You can have it!" So, Ken Stewart became pastor of the church and we felt really dejected thinking, "God showed us three years ago we would pastor this church but what He was really showing us was that we were the interim pastors?"

After Ken Stewart became pastor, I put my whole heart into teaching at Rhema. About half way through the year God tapped me on the shoulder and again said, "You're going to pastor Grace Fellowship." My response was "No way!" God kept at me for three months. By this time our marriage had begun to flow together. I slowly began to realize that Ken Stewart had been the interim pastor. God brought him in to get the church

in order and hold it together until we could get our lives together to fulfill the call to pastor. God used Ken Stewart to turn us around in our marriage and keep the church stabilized until we were ready and then God called him to road ministry.

Your light will shine in the world only as brightly as it shines in your home. You cannot be an effectual minister in the world if you're not an effectual minister in your own home. I had to come to the realization that my wife was as much a gift of God's grace to me as the ministry to which He had called me.

First Peter 3:7 says, "*Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife...*" Notice, this verse says a husband is to dwell with his wife *according to knowledge*. The knowledge being referred to is knowledge of the Word. I began to learn through knowledge of the Word how I was to treat my wife. Our marriage turned around and was abundantly blessed and we began to flow in the blessings of God.

III. Stability Comes From the Word

My desire is for Christians to become stable and dependable. It seems that so many Christians use God as an excuse for everything—not keeping their word, not keeping obligations, telling people one thing and doing something contrary and saying God told them to do it. Why would God tell us to do one thing one minute and have us do something totally different the next minute? God does not change. Day after day, He never changes. There is no variableness or shadow of turning with Him. And He wants us to be dependable, with no variableness or shadow of turning in our lives. Our word should be as good on Monday as it was on Tuesday. If we promise to do something a month from now, a month from now to the day we should do what we promised. We must remember that we are living epistles known and read of all men. Ephesians 4:14 tells us we are no longer to be children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. And today, many of God's children are being carried to and fro all in the name of God. We should be so dependable in the every day nitty-gritty of life that the world looks at us and says, "What is so different about you? You're so dependable. You're so stable." You, in turn, can reply "It is the word of God inside of me that brings stability. Would you like to know Jesus?" No matter what a person's call, God's Word brings stability. It brings stability in business, in school, in the home, and in the office. God has called His children to stability.

IV. Three Scriptural Reasons for Divorce

God hates divorce but He loves the divorcee. Often people look at divorce

as the lesser of two evils. When they discover the after affects of divorce are actually worse than if they had just stuck it out and worked through their problems, they regret going through the divorce.

Divorce, according to the Word of God, is sin. Unfortunately, many in the church have treated divorce as the unpardonable sin. Many churches will not allow a divorcee to hold a position of any kind in the church. They believe the anointing has left the divorcee.

Many may think, “Well, if divorce is a sin and I’m already divorced, is there any hope for me?” The answer is 1 John 1:9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Many divorcees in the body of Christ today were forced into divorce by their partner. *They* deserted you. *They* left you. *They* committed adultery and were unfaithful. And even though you wanted to work your marriage out, your mate refused.

There are three reasons given in the Word of God when divorce is acceptable.

A. Abuse

1 Corinthians 7:12-13:

*But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: if any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and **she be pleased to dwell with him**, let him not put her away.*

*And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and **if he be pleased to dwell with her**, let her not leave him.*

The first instance in which divorce is acceptable is abuse, specifically physical abuse. Notice, these verses say if a wife or husband are “*pleased to dwell*” with their mate. Someone who is beating his or her mate is not pleased to dwell with them. God does not want a person living in a home where they are repeatedly beaten up day after day. God has not called us to living our lives in this situation.

B. Desertion

1 Corinthians 7:15:

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

If one partner departs, the other is not under bondage to the marriage relationship. They may choose to depart because they have become involved in another relationship. Or, they may choose to depart because they no longer want the responsibility of marriage. Whatever the reason, you are not under obligation to continue in the relationship.

C. Adultery

Matthew 5:31-32:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Jesus said fornication is a legitimate reason in the Word of God for divorce.

Deuteronomy 24:1-2:

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.

The word “*uncleanness*” is what Jesus described in the New Testament as “*fornication*”. Moses was describing the case of a woman committing adultery, but if a man committed adultery, the woman had the same rights.

By the time of the New Testament, the Scribes and Pharisees had changed the meaning of “*uncleanness*” to include every form of uncleanness. Since Jewish law forbade eating pork, husbands would get their wives to eat pork and then use this as an excuse to divorce their wives. Under the law, if a person went into the same room as a dead person, they were considered unclean. So, a man wanting a divorce would ask his wife to bake something to take down the street, knowing she would walk into the room of a dead man and therefore, be unclean. He would write a bill of divorcement and send her away.

V. Incompatibility is Not an Excuse

Society has done the same thing today. Society has taken God's guidelines related to divorce and stretched them so far, people divorce for every conceivable reason including incompatibility. Incompatibility is no excuse for divorce. When two people are born again and especially if they are Spirit-filled, they are *not* incompatible. A husband and wife are compatible because they are born again. There was a time when my wife and I swore we no longer loved each other. We began to believe the lie that we had married the wrong person. But we finally chose to use our faith for our marriage and the feelings returned.

Christians will use their faith for healing. They will use their faith for their finances. They will use their faith for direction. They will use their faith for their children. But when their emotions wane in marriage, they buy the lie that the marriage is over because they no longer *feel* like they love their spouse. They don't apply their faith to their marriage relationship and the relationship ends up in divorce. Faith always comes first, and then the feelings will line up. Love is not a feeling; it is a decision and a choice. Marriage is a lifetime commitment.

VI. Remarriage

Notice, Deuteronomy 24:2 says, "*When she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.*" This verse is clearly showing us that remarriage is condoned in the Word of God. Individuals and denominations have told divorcees that remarriage is not allowed in the Word of God. Some have even taught if you have remarried after divorce, you must leave that one and go back to the one to whom you were originally married. Some who have not remarried after divorce are still believing their mate will return. This is fine as long as that mate has not remarried. If your mate remarries, you are free. Divorce is a sin. Remarriage is not.

VII. Marriage and the Corinthian Mindset

1 Corinthians 7:1-2:

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

We may read these verses and think, "Well, of course every man should have his own wife." This seems like a simple truth to most Christians today. But to the Corinthians, this was a totally foreign concept. Corinth

was like the Las Vegas of its day. Everything was legal in Corinth. It was one of the major cities in Greece and the Grecian culture revolved around developing the mind and intellectualism. Some of the greatest universities of its day were found in Greece. But just as in our culture today, often intellectualism is accompanied by immorality. In Corinth, prostitution was legal. In fact, it was a form of worship. The Corinthians worshipped Venus. She was considered the goddess of love and the way people of that day worshipped her was through sex. Priestesses and priests were in the temple so men and women, through sex, could worship Venus. In the Corinthian culture, sex for pleasure was done outside the marriage. Sex within the confines of marriage was only to produce children. The only time a husband and wife had sex was for the purpose of procreation. In Corinth, parents prearranged marriages for their children before their children were grown. They had no choice in the matter. The husband and wife had very little contact with one another. Not only was fornication legal, homosexuality was also legal and condoned in the Corinthian culture. Anything that gave you pleasure was legal. When Paul came into the area, many were born again and delivered from the world and Satan's kingdom. But it was difficult to get the world out of them. The Corinthians brought their sexual perversions into the church.

The book of 1 Corinthians presented the basics of the Christian life. The Corinthians didn't believe in the resurrection, so Paul taught them about the resurrection in chapter fifteen. They abused the spiritual gifts, so in chapters twelve through fourteen, Paul taught them on the simplicity of the operation of the spiritual gifts. They would turn communion into wild parties where people would get drunk because drunkenness was a way of life in Corinth. So Paul taught them about rightly discerning the body of Christ in chapter eleven.

In chapter seven, Paul had to define marriage. Why? The minds of the Corinthians were so polluted they didn't understand the rights and wrongs of the marriage relationship. Paul taught them that husbands were only to have one wife and wives were only to have one husband. He taught them that marriage was not only for having children, it was also for sexual pleasure. Paul challenged their way of thinking and he challenged their very lifestyle. It was difficult for singles because to refrain from sex before marriage went contrary to the thinking of an entire society. But it was even worse for married couples because they had to take a good, hard, honest look at the person they had married. Husbands and wives didn't even know one another. In most cases, there was probably no love between them. To complicate things, one or the other may have even been involved in the homosexual lifestyle. Every reason for divorce existed in the Corinthian church. But Paul was telling them, "You can work out any problem in your relationship with the Word of God." God's Word can turn

the most impossible situations around. It doesn't matter how impossible it looks or seems.

There was a day I thought our marriage was impossible. I thought I had found the one situation God could not turn around. I'm so thankful I was wrong! I have met individuals where it looked like divorce was the only possible way out of their situation. One partner was involved in adultery. I've known of others where one partner was involved in homosexuality or lesbianism. Things looked impossible in their marriage. But I've seen some of those same couples make a decision to work at the marriage and to learn to love one another. And I've seen those marriages turn around because the couples have turned to the Lord of the impossible. Nothing is too difficult for Him!

VIII A Command to the Married

1 Corinthians 7:10:

*And unto the married **I command**, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:*

Notice, this is not a wish or desire concerning the married, it is a command from the Lord. The Lord is saying, "Wives, don't depart from your husbands." We could turn that around today to say, "Husbands, don't depart from your wives." If you have been thinking about divorce as if it looks like the only way out, your thinking is wrong. If you allow God to work in your marriage, if you make the decision to love one another by faith, if you will look at one another as a grace gift from God, your marriage will be turned around to become the greatest blessing in your life!