

Matthew 21-08-22b

We're ready now to resume our study in the Gospel of Matthew, looking at Jesus' words on marriage and divorce and eunuchs. And we've gone over 1 Corinthians chapter 7, and this really is such a wonderful complimentary passage to amplify and extend what Jesus said. We've seen the opportunity for fellowship, the opportunity for mutual granting of authority to each other in marriage, and to put the interest of the other ahead of one's own interest.

This is the idea. This is the definition. So, do not deprive one another in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 5, except with consent for a time.

Notice that if there is a reason why this expression of mutual interest cannot be accomplished, there is consent. This is a mutual, one flesh, we agree on everything. We agree on what we do.

We agree on what we don't do. We agree that your comfort, your concerns, your happiness, your gratification comes ahead of my own. And if there's some reason why this cannot be accomplished, it has to be done by consent.

I'll give you an abstract case. Suppose a guy gets a light bulb over his head, and he wants to go to Morocco and be a missionary to the Moroccans. Maybe he went and got a pair of shoes and saw they were made out of Morocco leather, and all of a sudden he gets the notion he wants to go be a missionary to Morocco.

Can he just tell his wife, well, honey, I've got a burden from the Lord. God spoke to me in the night, and I've got to go to Morocco. Not without consent.

If he's going to be gone for two or three years, how is he going to be able to look out for the interests of his wife? How is he going to be able to do this mutual looking out for? This is not just, oh, can we do this kinky thing only without consent? Or can we stop doing kinky things only with consent? Do you see the metaphorical use of this marriage circumstance to talk about everything in marriage and everything in unified groups of believers in a wider context? Unity is the theme. We avoid that which divides. We encourage and we support that which unifies.

Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time. And why would you do this? Give yourselves to fasting and prayer and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control, your lack of self-control. Look at verse eight.

I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them even if they remain as I am, but if they cannot exercise self-control, very interesting. We have self-control here two different times. Anytime scripture repeats something, it's a good idea to take a close

look at it.

So in verse seven, the limited duration of this separation and during the separation, there should be fasting and prayer, i.e. spiritual priorities. Why would you fast and pray when you can't be together for whatever reason? There can be physical reasons for physical intimacy, there can be pregnancy, there can be medical complications, there can be injury, there can be all kinds of things. There can be physical separation in the sense of I've got a one-year tour overseas, I'm in the military, whatever it might be, but do not deprive one another except with consent for a time.

And it says that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer. This is not, oh, sorry, dear, we're going to not be intimate because I'm going to fast and pray for a certain period of time. It's not.

The idea here is if there is going to be something that happens with consent for a time to avoid a self-control problem of any kind, fasting and prayer need to be put in the place where you would be devoting yourself to the interest of your spouse. You devote yourself to the interests of spiritual life. If you can't be there to support and encourage and look out for and grant authority to that spouse, then you need to be in self-denial and prayer.

Fasting is self-denial. That's all it is. Fasting can take many forms.

You can fast from a hobby. You can fast from a social aspect of your life. You can fast from a sport.

You can fast from work. You can take two weeks off. And it's a sabbatical.

It is a time of suspension of a particular activity. The first and foremost, of course, is eating. There's a lot of different kinds of fasts.

Fasting, the Bible doesn't ever prescribe fasting. None of the feasts in Israel prescribed a fast. The Jews fast on some of their holidays, but the Bible doesn't prescribe a fast.

Fast is something you voluntarily do, and you can pick what kind of fast it is. You know, I think I'm spending too much time on my ham radio and not talking to my wife. I'm going to fast.

I'm going to suspend. I'm not even going to turn the thing on. I'm going to spend this week, the time I would have spent on that hobby, I'm going to spend with my wife.

I had this plan to do X, Y, or Z, the wife might have. I'm not even going to speculate on what that might be, but not going to do that. I want to spend time with my husband.

I don't want our relationship to become distant. I don't want to lose that spiritual and social intimacy that we have. Our fellowship seems like we're losing time.

So this thing that takes my time, I'm going to fast from that. But if I do have to spend time away from my spouse for some requirement, some reason, sometimes it is just in the course of nature. You think about Jesus talking about the eunuch.

Sometimes it's just unavoidable. Somebody gets sick and has to be quarantined and you're separated. It can be a job requirement that takes you away.

You've got to go to a convention. You've got to go to a client site to do work for a couple of weeks, or you've got to go overseas. You're in the military.

Even the reserves have to go away for a couple of weeks in the summer. It's imposed just by the vagaries of circumstance. Sometimes it is people.

Somebody has made a decision. I'll tell you a good one for wives. Many times somebody's in ill health and the wife will leave the house and go spend time with someone else in the family to nurse them back to health and give them attention that they need because they're under the weather or have had an operation or whatever.

There's a necessary separation. It isn't anybody's fault. It's just a part of life.

But if there is a need for this, there is consent. The husband and wife need to agree that, yes, it's a good thing for the wife to go. It's a good thing for the man to go.

Yes, this is work. Yes, this is helpful. This is needful, whatever it might be.

We agree to this separation. But notice people make much about the Bible, the wives submit to your husbands and people get their elbows in the air over that. The Bible emphasizes the mutuality, the consent, the each looking out for the interests of the others.

This is not a hierarchical arrangement. It is. For the husband, the wife is the boss, for the wife, the husband is the boss.

And when both agree in that and operate that way, it's a beautiful thing. And if you're going to be separate, you do it with consent. If you're coming together, you do it with consent.

What you do and don't do, you do with consent. You're of like mind. You are one mind.

You are one flesh. Do you ever have an argument with yourself? It's really tedious. I hate arguing with myself.

I have this dialogue in my mind and the wiser, smarter part of me says one thing and the angry, impatient, passionate side of me says something else. And I have this ongoing argument. It's a terrible thing to be arguing with yourself.

Have you ever wrestled with a decision and well, I could do this, but I could do that. Oh, I would really like to do that, but I really ought to do this. Ought to, like to, should, want.

Internal debate is really not pleasant. I don't enjoy wrestling with my nature. I don't enjoy wrestling with a decision.

I like to see the hill, take the hill or see the way around the hill and take that because it's so much easier. But it's even worse when the two are one flesh and you're contesting each other. You're at odds.

You're not harmonious. You're not one flesh. You're not one mind.

You're not two hearts beating as one. That's an awful thing. And, and the Bible says, don't do that.

Unity is priceless. You cannot put a price on spiritual unity. Unity pleases God.

God unites. God does not divide. God doesn't chop up the body of Christ.

The body of Christ chops itself up. God does not dissolve marriages. People ruin marriages.

God brings things together. We are the ones who screw them up. So the wife does not have authority.

Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time. You can't say, well, you know, our marriage works best when you're in Japan and I'm in America. Our marriage works best.

The less we see each other, the happier we are. No, the model is intimacy. The model is unity.

If you're going to be disunited, if you're going to be separated only for a time and you need to concentrate on fasting and prayer during that time, in lieu of the intimacy and the effort that you would be putting into each other, come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. That's verse five, because of your lack of self-control. Then you have it in verse nine again.

So we have it in verse five and in verse nine. What is Paul talking about when he says self-control? The word for control, the root word here is *krateo*, the verb *krateo*. And it means to have power.

You remember in Ephesians chapter one, I've mentioned it many times. You've got all five Greek words for power there. You've got *dunamis*, you've got, or *dunameo*, you've got *krateo*, you have both potential and operative power.

You've got all five words there. This is the noun kratia, K-R-A-S-I-A, and krato is the get things done kind of power. Kratos as a noun means to dominate, to power through or over a thing, to use power, to accomplish a thing, to conquer, to perform a mighty deed.

It's often translated might, not by might nor by power. This is kratos. It's the get things done, make it happen.

You say jump, I say how high, and then I do it. When Jesus said, go cast your line into Peter and take out the first fish and look in its mouth. When Peter did that, that was kratos.

He's a fisherman. He knows how to fish. He knows how to bait a hook.

He knows how to find where the fish are. He knows how to get a fish. He knows how to get that hook out, knows how to open its mouth and look inside.

He's a fisherman. He has that power. Well, this is a kratia.

It's the alpha privative. It's the negative. It's powerlessness.

You don't have power. Now, what could this possibly mean? Well, we're going to see this word. It's only used in Matthew one time, and it's coming up in, in, uh, in fact, it's only used to across.

See, it is only used twice in the, in the whole new Testament at once is here. And once is in keep your finger in first Corinthians and turn back to Matthew 23, very close to where we are Matthew 23. And our word is found in verse 25.

So this is in the woe section to the Pharisees. You remember the seven woes, woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, uh, these blind guides who in verse 24 strain at a net and swallow a camel. Then verse 25, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion.

And it's translated here, self-indulgence, self-indulgence, but the word is a kratia. The cup is full of what is extortion. This is taking advantage of others, taking from others.

What doesn't belong to you. Uh, you misuse your authority. You misuse your position extortion and a kratia powerlessness.

This is self-indulgence because you have no power to control your impulses. When I have an impulse, I must gratify it. I can't control myself.

It's lack of self-control. A kratia is lack of self-control. It is lack of power over oneself.

Now this is Paul is going to put an even finer point on this as we move down toward verse nine, come together. Again, notice what does unity do? I would suggest you put

this in the margin of your Bible. Our unity defeats Satan.

Unity defeats Satan. Satan avails himself of the crack in the armor, the crack in the wall, come together again, be unified so that Satan doesn't tempt you and leverage your lack of self-control. We are stronger together.

We are more susceptible to attack by Satan when we are apart, even when it's legitimate, even when it is by mutual consent, even when it is for a good purpose and a good cause. Being separate, once God has united a man and a woman, them being apart is a bad thing and it needs to not be for very long. Otherwise, Satan will find a way to leverage himself.

He'll put the point of the pry bar in there and crack that unity apart. Many different ways you can do it, but Satan loves disunity, loves disharmony. How did the fruit get eaten in the garden? Where was Adam when the dialogue took place between the serpent and Eve? Satan, his original temptation of humanity happened when the man and the woman were not together.

Satan will tempt you if you're not together. And this is not just physically together. This is united in mind, united in purpose, united in common, looking out for the interests of each other.

I say this as a concession, not as a commandment, verse 6. He says, don't make a legalistic deal out of this. You need to catch the spirit of it. I say this as a concession, that marriage, he says, has its place, has its purpose.

Paul is not anti-marriage. You wouldn't have people if you didn't have a marriage. Marriage was designed by God, and a good elder in a church is a husband.

He's a one-woman man, and he's got a family, and he has a household. This is a good thing. The Bible is not anti-marriage.

People come to this when Paul says in the next verse, I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. This is not the gift of being married or not being married.

This is because we have a gift that in God's plan and purpose connects to a lot of circumstances. If someone has a gift of teaching or being a pastor, God is going to arrange many other circumstances around that gift. If you have the gift of helps, if you have the gift of administration, if you are a wonderful organizer, if you are a wonderful person with a gift, you can go down the list, get the gift of spiritual lists.

You will see that each of us has a special ability apportioned by the Spirit. Some of them have names and some of them don't. But God doesn't just drop a gift into a circumstance without forethought.

If you are gifted with children, then God is going to put you in a situation where you can be with and exploit and express that giftedness with children. He's not going to drop you in some circumstance where there are no kids, and yet you have the gift of mentoring and helping and teaching and nurturing these children. If you have the gift of pastor, God is going to put you in a place where you can acquire the tools and then use that gift and sling the hash on the mess deck so that the troops can eat and be fortified and ready to go out and do their job.

Whatever your gift is, it's not in a vacuum. It has connections. It's not just that you have an ability.

God is going to put people with skills in places where those skills can best bless the body of Christ and glorify God. So it's got connections. He's not saying, I wish all men were unmarried.

Gracious sakes, that would be the end of humanity as we know it. What is he saying? I wish that all men were as I myself in the sense that I am free to fully devote myself to my gift. His gift is apostleship.

Everybody knows it. He's reviewed it several times in 1 Corinthians. He made a big deal out of it in the first few chapters.

If you remember, I planted a Paulist water. God gave the increase. Don't be partial to one apostle or another.

I am a Cephas and so on. He says, look, I've got a gift. You know this.

And wouldn't it be great if everybody could devote themselves exclusively to their gift? His particular gift is not one where a wife can accompany and come along and do these travels and endure imprisonment and rejection and stoning. And can you imagine what the wife of Paul would have had to go through had he had one when he was stoned and left for dead at Lystra? She would be frantic. She'd be out of her mind with care and concern and trying to travel around in all of the dangerous, the shipwreck, snakes coming out of the fire and biting him.

He's gotten the 40 stripes minus one three different times in his life. You go down the list of hardships he endured, trying to bring a wife through that and being concerned about her, trying to protect her, trying to keep her from suffering and suffering through her love for him would have just been a torture for a woman. And Paul said, you know, the great thing about me is for my gift, I am unencumbered with having to take time and energy and thought away from my full dedication to being an apostle to look out for a wife.

I wish everybody had that luxury, but he's the exception and he knows it. He says, everybody's not me. Everybody's not an apostle.

Everybody doesn't have the unique calling that I have as a result of my gift. So I could wish that all men were even as I myself, but each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. Sometimes you have great latitude to express your gift because you've got minimal other entanglements.

Other times your gift has to function in concert with family and employment. And, you know, you can be bi-vocational, tri-vocational as a pastor. You can be someone who's active in the church, but also has a job and occasionally has to travel and also has a family.

And how much can you do for the church? How much time can you spend? How much effort can you expend? How tired can you get? Depends on your other commitments. And Paul says, you know, it's great to be me because I can throw a hundred percent of myself into being an apostle. But every gift is different and some of them function this way and some of them function that.

That's all he's saying. He's not saying, I wish nobody was married. This is the same Paul that's going to say to Timothy and Titus, if you're going to have leadership in the church, they better be married and they better be raising children and doing it in an orderly and godly manner.

The same Paul. I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I am. If circumstance has assigned you nobody to be one flesh with, nobody to exchange authorities with, nobody to be concerned with unity and with all of the other things that accompany a marriage.

If you find yourself single through not yet having entered into marriage or your marriage has been suspended for a time because of the death of your spouse, I don't think it ends the marriage, but it's suspended. You're a widow. It's good for them if they remain even as I am.

In other words, it's not bad. It's good in the sense that it's not bad. God has you in this circumstance for a reason.

Look for his purpose. Exploit the opportunity that you have. He says, look at me because I am not encumbered, if you will, with a marriage.

Look at the opportunities that I have. If you are not encumbered with a marriage at the present time, look for your opportunities. Don't assume that because you haven't yet met the guy or the guy has left for a time, don't assume that this is a bad thing and needs to be remedied.

You've got to hunt around. Marriage is to become one flesh. God instituted Adam and Eve and I need to find somebody and marry them at all costs.

Or if I've lost my spouse, I need to remarry so that there's a man in the house. He says, no, look, it's good. If you're like I am, that's a good thing.

Why? Why is it good? People just come and say, well, Paul says it's good not to be married. That's why monks and priests and nuns are celibate because Paul said it was good. Why is he saying it? Look at the context.

If you find yourself in a single situation, look for the good. Paul says this is a good thing. It's not a bad thing that needs to be fixed.

Bad things need fixing. Good things don't need fixing. This is not a problem that needs fixing.

It's a situation that can be exploited for God's glory and for our blessing and benefit and fruitfulness. Use the time. Redeem the time.

The days are evil. Redeem the time. You're going to have more time because there is not this component that is taking a part of your effort and time.

So it is good if they remain as I am, but if they cannot exercise self-control, if the lack of a partner gives an opportunity for Satan, what was the problem? How did Satan get into the marriage when the man and woman were separate just for a time by consent? He says, hurry up and come back together because Satan will exploit it. He will exploit your lack of power. You don't have as much power when you're on your own.

Two are better than one. Threefold cord is not quickly broken, right? Two is better than one. Stronger.

If Satan is going to exploit your singleness and take advantage of your problems with control, then let them marry. It is better to marry than to be inflamed. The literal meaning here is to be inflamed.

That argument I have with myself, my rational, calm, knowledgeable, biblical self, and my angry, impatient, I want it. I want it now. Why can't it be this way? This is the inflamed side.

This is the wise side. It is better to be wise than to be inflamed. It is better to act in wisdom.

It is better to act based on what you know and what the Bible says than to be impulsive, to be impertinent, to be perversive, to rush in where angels fear to tread because it seemed like a good idea at the time. I watched a series they tried to launch called Bad Ideas. This guy just gets a friend or two and says, I've got a really bad idea.

Let's do that. They get into a hot pepper eating contest. It starts with mild peppers and works all the way up to ghost peppers and some kind of scorpion peppers.

When they get to that last pepper, they're throwing up, they're retching, they're pouring gallons of milk into their face without relief. Yeah, that was a bad idea. Our impulsive self is full of bad ideas, and Satan knows it.

He will introduce those bad ideas like, eat the fruit. It'll make you wise. No, you're already wise.

Act in wisdom and don't eat the fruit. Don't abandon your wisdom for a false promise of greater wisdom. But why did Eve eat the fruit? She saw that it was pretty.

It was good to look upon and desirable. Desirable. And she did not have her self-control.

She didn't have the power to avoid eating that fruit. So look at the theme here. Self-control.

What is pornography? Pornography is looking out for my own interest instead of honoring the contract I made, the covenant that I entered into, the faithfulness that I have pledged. I am going to be faithless. I'm going to, in my own interest, do something that is harmful to those closest to me, those on the other side of this arrangement.

Paul says, you know what? It would be great if marriage wasn't something that took away time from exercising your spiritual gift. But it is better to marry than to have Satan running amok in our disunity. So that is completely harmonious with what Jesus said over in Matthew chapter 19.

Marriage is a wonderful thing. It is a place where gifts can actually be expressed. But Paul was talking about, and if you continue reading here in Corinthians, he is looking at a distressing time.

And he says, if you flip over to chapter 9 right quick, he picks up this theme. Am I an apostle? Am I free? Am I not those things? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? And he talks about the things that he denies himself. Verse 4, do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right, in verse 5, to take along a believing wife as do the other apostles? Notice, take along a believing wife, a full of faith wife.

Even in his passing allusions to marriage, how much affection is due to a faithless, pornography spouse, an abusive spouse? Affection does not do them. What kind of wife could an apostle willingly and rightfully take along? A believing wife, not a faithless wife, not an unsupportive drag in the sack race trying to go the opposite direction. A believing wife, like the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Peter.

Is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? And so on. Look at verse 19. This is 1 Corinthians 9, 19.

Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win the more. Paul makes himself a servant to those who are the objects of his apostle gift, the churches, the believers, the pastors that he's encouraging and training. He makes himself their servant in a marriage.

The husband is the servant of the wife. She's got the authority. She's got the authority over his body.

She is the servant to the husband. He's got authority over her body in terms of her willing service. Paul says, I do this willingly.

I am free from all men. I have made myself a servant to all we make ourself. What does this require of us to make ourself a servant of our spouse, to make ourself a servant in the function of our gift? Gift spiritual gift is for the benefit of the body of Christ.

And it is a service. Every spiritual gift is a service. Pastor is not an authority gift.

It is a service gift. It's a service. We enter into willing exercise of these things.

Paul says, I have made myself a servant that takes Kratos, that takes self-control. I will willingly subordinate myself to the service. I will make myself a servant to my wife.

I will make myself a servant to those I support. I will make myself a servant to those for whom God gave me a spiritual gift to function. I do this willingly and it requires self-control.

What is the fruit of the spirit? If you look at this word in Greek, the first use of self-control is akrosia. Don't let Satan tempt you. Don't let him pay raddo you.

Remember, this is trying to get you to fail. In verse nine, it is a slightly different word in first Corinthians seven, nine. If they do not have, and this is Kratos is still in the middle, but there's a lot of stuff added onto it.

There's N in the beginning, N Kratos. So it's inner control, inner power. And it's got the, the oh my ending O M A I. So if you read it here in the text, it's, it's N Kratuontai.

Ontai comes from oh my. All you need to know about that is when you put O M A I, this makes it reflexive. It puts it in kind of the middle sense.

This is something you do to, and for, and in yourself. And it's double emphasized. Kratos is in the middle.

N is at the beginning. It's in me and oh my, I'm doing it for myself. So in verse nine there, when it says, if they cannot have inner strength to make themselves a servant, if, if you can't serve as a single, then get into a marriage and serve there, widow or single.

The idea is you, we all need, and here's the summary point. This is, this is my final point for the morning from the word of God. When you read what Jesus said and you read what Paul said, we need a place of submission.

It either needs to be in a marriage or in the service of a gift. We need a place of submission. We need a place to practice and exercise humility.

If you cannot do it as a single, I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain as I am, so long as they have that opportunity for self-control, specifically self-control that looks outward and finds a way to serve, finds a way to be a blessing and a benefit, exercise a spiritual gift. If you can't do that, if then, if they cannot have that inner self-control specifically for the benefit of others, that's what you get from verse five. Let them marry.

It is better to marry than to have these passions that are out of control because you've got no arena to subordinate. You've got no reason. You don't have a visible place and say, if I mess up my self-control, I'm going to hurt my spouse.

If I mess my self-control up, I'm going to hurt my church. You look at pastors. I cannot tell you the statistics.

Even when I was in seminary decades ago, we're off the scale on personal problems for pastors, and it is lack of self-control. It is lack of recognizing a threat and stopping it before it starts. It is a matter of recognizing that this is not an opportunity to use power.

It is an opportunity to serve. This is condemned throughout the Bible. The servant who sees that his master has delayed his coming, the servant that was put in charge of the household, while the master is away, separated, there is no opportunity for the servant on a daily basis to exercise submission in the presence of the master.

The master is away. The servant is put in charge of the household. But while the master is away, he says, well, my master delays his coming.

And he begins to eat himself sick out of the larder and beat and abuse his fellow servants. He's lost the arena for submission and the practice of service. Marriage is a place to practice service.

Spiritual gift is a place to practice service. If you're not married, be sure that you have an arena for submission and service. And if you can't find that, then Paul says, if they can't do that, and that's going to lead to lack of self-control.

If you don't practice it, you lose it. If you don't have a place to practice self-control, you will lose self-control. So either find it in your environment.

If you can't do that, and you're lacking your self-control, get married. That'll fix that.

Because if you do your marriage right, you're going to be occupied with how to please your wife.

Remember, Paul talks about this in another context here. You know, the man that's unmarried thinks about the things of the Lord. That man that's married thinks about how to please his wife.

Either one of those is good. You just need a place to practice submission. Without it, Satan will find a crack and we'll be in trouble.

Well, we'll pick up our study next time. Let's close here. Father, thank you for the clarity of your communication to us, how important it is for us to have the mind of Christ, to as he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant and humbled himself, that we should do the same.

We pray that as we reflect on these truths, that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate them for us and illuminate the circumstances in our lives where we can put them into practice. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.