

Green and Red Lights

Not everyone should get married. Those who should marry should not marry just anyone! Discerning whether or not it is God's will for you to marry this person at this time is one of the most important matters in your life. God does not leave us in the dark about how to make this discernment. As a matter of fact, the Lord Jesus never leaves His followers in the dark (Read John 8:12). Light about marriage, whether to marry, and whom to marry, is given abundantly in I Corinthians 7. Read this whole chapter prayerfully, and see in it five "traffic signals" that show us when to "go" and when to "stop" in pursuing marriage. These are listed as "green lights," and all five should be green before you marry! Each green light, of course, also has a corresponding red light, which will be noted.

1. Need for Marriage

The first green light in the marriage issue is a need to be married (See vs. 1-9). Most people do have a need to be married. This is a social, emotional, and physical need. It is the normal, the natural thing to seek out a life-companion of the opposite sex. Marriage helps us "avoid fornication" (sex sin) because it fulfills our needs in a righteous way (Remember Hebrews 13:4). However, there are many advantages to the single life. I Corinthians 7 has much to say about these advantages (Note vs. 8 and 32-35). So God gives some Christians a "gift" (vs. 7-9) to remain unmarried but fulfilled. Paul the apostle was given this gift. Jesus Christ lived the single life in a holy way, and also spoke of the gift that makes this possible (See Matthew 19:10-12). If you have been given a gift to be content in the single life, rejoice in it, and use it! What great advantages the single Christian has in serving God if he will stay pure! There are so many commitments and obligations from which the unmarried person is free! No believer gifted to remain single should stoop to be married. God has something special for your life! But a person who feels the great need to be married (not pressure from others, but a real and personal need) should assume that God wants him to be married, and that He will hear that believer's prayer for a partner. If God hasn't given you the gift to be single, then He must plan for you to be married. But be sure to consider the single life and this matter of God's gifts before you rush into marriage. The red light is a gift to remain single; the green light is a need to be married. If God gives you this green light, be sure to make yourself as marriage-able as you can. Develop the characteristics of Ephesians 5 that make for a good husband or wife. See in Genesis 24 in a woman, and in Ruth 2 in a man the characteristics God says to find in a marriage prospect. See in Esther 2 that preparation to enhance physical attractiveness is not wrong. Let the Bible guide you to your spouse. The Book of Proverbs is also helpful in preparing a Christian to "meet the right one."

2. Willingness to Do the Will of God.

Before you can expect to marry right, you must surrender your will to God's will (See vs. 10-24). Notice what this chapter says about God's commandments and God's call. God's commands are for everyone, and God's call is for each individual. Happiness is found in obeying God's commands and in heeding God's call, as well as abiding in that calling. Study this out. Marriage is not about what you want. It is about God's will for your life. When you are yielded to do whatever God's will is (stay single, get married, stay married, marry God's choice for you, etc.), you have a green light. Until the time you make this surrender, you'd better not get married. Selfwill and lack of consecration are a red light for you.

3. Freedom to Be Married.

Some folks are not free to marry (See again vs. 10-15). Verse 27 says that some are "bound unto a wife," and some are "loosed from a wife." Married people are bound to each other until they die (Read v. 39). An exception to this general rule is found in verse 15, where the case of an "unbelieving" partner divorcing his Christian spouse is handled. In this case, too, the believer is "not under bondage." In other words, he is free to marry again. Comparing I Corinthians 7 with Matthew 19 leads us to say that this bondage to a former spouse is effective if and when the departed one commits adulterous fornication against the Christian. It is clear that life-long marriage is the perfect will of God, but that remarriage is permitted for the believer when a sinful spouse breaks the marriage by

unfaithfulness. It is a green light to marriage when the prospect is scripturally free. It is a bright red light when he is not. God protects you with red lights. Don't neglect to heed them.

4. Approval to Be Married.

A man should never marry a lady without her father's consent (See vs. 25-38). Notice that the question handled here is about fathers and their virgin girls. Notice that Dad has absolute veto power! Notice that he is admonished to be thoughtful and kind in his decisions, but that his decision is a red or green light about the marriage.

5. Unity in the Lord.

Christians should only marry Christians (See vs. 39-40). A widow may marry "whom she will," but "only in the Lord." II Corinthians 6:14-18 gives us some strong reasons for staying out of spiritually mixed marriages (Read it). If the prospect is not a believer, you have a red light. If he is a believer, this light is green. This is not to say that you should marry anyone who says he is a Christian. New Testament believers did not give Christian recognition to anyone who had not confessed Christ openly, been baptized, and become actively involved in the local church. It's easy to say, "Oh yes, I'm saved." Some will say it just to have a Christian marry them. Don't be fooled. Consider no prospect who is not a Christ-confessing, church-attending, clean-living, consecrated Christian who is willing to do God's will, just as you are. Marriage will not mean a turning off God's path for you, if the marriage is God's will for you. The right marriage will occur when the paths of two people following Jesus gently merge.

Decision: Don't marry unless it is in God's will and God's way.
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