

## **Reasons for Remaining Single, Part 1: Because of the World**

1 Corinthians 7:25-31

1831

Now, this morning, turn again to 1 Corinthians chapter 7. We are, for our guests, happy to say that you are catching us in the midst of a most exciting and interesting study. We're going through the book of 1 Corinthians, and this is a very practical book which deals with problems among Christians, problems in the church of Christ. Chapter 7 deals with problems surrounding the issue of marriage. This morning, as we come to verses 25 to 40, we come to a very interesting section that I've entitled, "Reasons for Remaining Single." Now, that is an unusual title, and it's a very unusual topic, a very unusual section of Scripture. If you came this morning as a visitor expecting to hear some great theological treatise, or maybe you came kind of waiting to hear about how you become a Christian, well, we'll be happy to tell you that personally afterwards, but this morning we're going to approach the text that is before us, and a very, very unusual text it is, dealing with reasons for remaining single.

Now, we're not, at Grace Community Church, convinced that marriage is bad. I'm married and most all of the people in this church are either married or anxious about it. We're not against marriage. But the Bible is very balanced in the area of marriage, and it recognizes that for some people, singleness is better than marriage because God has gifted them to be single, and the church must maintain a balance in understanding this. Even though Peter calls marriage the grace of life, and even though Paul exalts marriage as the picture of Christ's relation to the church, and Paul states even that marriage is the norm, even though our Lord Jesus Christ acknowledged the strength of the marriage bond in Matthew 19, it is still true that for some people that singleness is best. The norm of marriage that is presented throughout Scripture is not to make us think that anybody single is abnormal. It isn't so. One Bible teacher said if you are single, you are incomplete. Is that true? I don't think it's true. I don't think it's true that single people are losers, single people are misfits, single people are incomplete, abnormal, and yet I think that our society – at least our Christian society – tends to think that.

As soon as our daughters get to the age of 19 or 20, we begin to panic if they don't have a boyfriend. As soon as our sons get to around 20 to 25, we really get panicky, and if they get over 25 and haven't found a girl, we begin to wonder about whether or not they have some secret problem that even the parents don't know about. Or maybe there's some kind of personality quirk that only manifests itself when they get around girls and this is what destroys the possibility of any such relationship. And we tend to push our children into marriage. The first consideration that we have toward our children is, "We gotta find you the right person to marry," and we force the issue, and very frequently marriages turn out to be disastrous because they are the result of prodding and pushing from parents rather than the design of the Will of God. What we're going to see this morning and probably next week, because I doubt whether we'll get through all of this, is that if a father was really wise – and we'll implicate a mother in that – rather than beginning to look for a partner for his child, he would start first of all considering that the best thing for that child might be that that child remain

single, that that would be the starting ground and marriage would be the second choice. Now, maybe that's a little different than you thought, but this whole chapter will support that.

Now, the Bible does teach about being single. In fact, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, we have already seen three basic principles about being single. Number one, being single is good. Verse 1 of chapter seven says it is good for a man not to touch a woman. We saw that the phrase "to touch a woman" means to have a sexual relationship. It is good for a man to be celibate. It is good for a person not to marry.

First of all, then, to be single is good. Secondly, to be single is a gift. God gifts certain people with the *charismata* of singleness. Verse 7: "Every man has his proper gift of God. One after this manner and another after that. I say therefore, to the unmarried and widowed, it is good for them if they abide even as I." It's good, if you have the gift, to remain single. Thirdly, we've learned that your marital status has no relationship to salvation. When you become a Christian, it is not incumbent upon you immediately to get married. Nor is it incumbent upon you immediately to get single and dump your wife or your husband in order that you might have greater devotion to God. And this is precisely the conflict in Corinth. The Jews were saying you must get married, the Gentiles were saying you must be celibate, or ascetic, and the apostle Paul says no. Verse 20: "Let every man abide in the same calling in which he was called." Whatever situation you were in – verse 24 says – when you were saved, stay there. If you're single, that's good; if you're married, that's good.

All right, now, we've learned that singleness is good. Singleness is a gift, and if you don't have the gift, don't try to be single – you'll only frustrate yourself. Thirdly, singleness is not necessarily related to salvation. You don't have to get married immediately upon being saved, and you don't have to get unmarried immediately upon being saved. You can be equally surrendered whether you're single or married.

Now, in verses 25 to 40, Paul expands on this basic presentation. The Corinthians were asking questions – according to verse 1 of chapter 7 – concerning the things about which you wrote, Paul is replying to direct questions they were asking, and the question he's answering here is: Should they get married? Is it better to be single to serve God with a devoted heart and a single mind, or is it necessary to get married like the Jewish traditionalists were saying in order to fulfill the Will of God? The Jews said you had to be married or you would violate God's command to replenish the earth, and the Gentiles, coming out of the philosophical asceticism, would say it's better to be single and you can devote yourself totally to God. Paul is saying both are good. Some have the gift of singleness, and if they do, that's good. Some do not have the gift of singleness, and it's better for them to marry, and that's good as well.

Notice: Being single and being married has no relation to spirituality. Single people are not more spiritual, neither are married ones. But now, in order to try to prod those people who have the gift of singleness to use that gift and not to get married, he adds verses 25 to 40, and this is an encouragement to single people to see whether or not God has given them a gift that they are to maintain and stay single.

Now, notice verse 25 and we'll start at that point. Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord, yet I give my judgment as one that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be trustworthy. Now, concerning *parthenoi* – the word "virgins" – to whom does this refer? Well, there have been all different opinions offered by strange and weird groups, but there isn't really any difficulty in

interpreting the word. The word simply means virgin. *Parthenoi* simply means virgin, someone who is unmarried. Now, since it is used with the feminine article, it is referring to unmarried girls. Virgin girls is the objective in the statement “now concerning virgins.” That’s precisely who he has in mind. I might add that once, in Revelation 14:4, the word is used to refer to bachelors, but here with the feminine article, he has in mind single girls.

“Concerning single girls,” he says, that is, unmarried women, unmarried virgin daughters, “I have no commandment of the Lord.” Now, when the Lord settled a question with a direct statement, Paul said so. For example, in verse 10, he says, “The Lord said, ‘Let not the wife depart from her husband,’” and he’s quoting Jesus. He says here now, “Regarding unmarried girls – regarding single daughters – ‘I have no command of Jesus.’” He didn’t say anything, and he means by that, “I can’t quote any recorded words of Christ.” Jesus didn’t say anything about this. When the Lord stated a command, he said it. When the Lord gave no command, Paul also said that. In verse 12 he said, “To the rest, speak I, not the Lord.” In other words, “Here’s something now that I’m going to speak.” It’s not less authoritative; it’s just that the Lord didn’t say anything about it, so he can’t quote Christ. So he says, “Now, the Lord had nothing to say about this, but I give my judgment” – notice it in verse 25 – “and not just as an ordinary man, but as one that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be trustworthy” – or to be believable. “I am giving my judgment.” Now, does that mean that this is Paul’s opinion? Not really. Not at all. You see, there are issues which the Lord spoke about, and there are issues which the Lord did not speak about. Now, notice this: Of the ones that the Lord did not speak about, the apostles often spoke.

Now, sometimes when the apostles spoke, they gave absolute, authoritative dictums, but sometimes they only gave guidelines because there could be no absolutes. Now, in this section, he is saying, “Look, I am giving you a guideline, I am giving you good advice.” Incidentally, it is not just Paul’s advice, it is the advice of the Holy Spirit through him, but there cannot be an absolute. He cannot say, “All of you must be single” or “All of you must be married” because for some there is marriage and for some there is singleness. And so he says, “Let me give you some advice as to the general principles to apply in each case. I’m giving you my judgment on this. I’m giving you general guidelines, and they are not independent of the Holy Spirit.” In verse 40 he says, “And I consider” – not “I think so” in the terms of our use in English, but “I consider that I also have the Spirit of God,” and it’s sarcastic because those people who were confusing them were saying, “Well, we have the mind of the Spirit and Paul is simply saying, ‘I consider that I have the mind of the Spirit, too.’”

So the spirit of God was behind it. This is Paul’s counsel, general principles, to govern the whole attitude of believers towards singleness. “Now, concerning virgin daughters, there is no direct quote of the Lord I can give, but I’m going to give you my opinion, or my judgment, my assessment, not just as an average man, but as one that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.” It isn’t just the counsel of a wise man but one who had obtained mercy of the Lord. What does that mean? One who was worthy of confidence. One, who by special mercy of God, had been given an unusual insight into truth. “I’m speaking to you as one who is *pistos*” – that’s the word translated here “faithful.” It means believable, trustworthy. That is a frequent use of that word in the New Testament. Worthy of confidence. “You can trust my judgment. God has given me, by his mercy, unusual insights into truth that you can trust.” Paul felt himself indebted to the mercy of Christ for those inward truths that he had. Christ, by His grace, had made him a believable preacher, had made him an authoritative apostle. And so he’s saying, “You Corinthians can accept wisdom here, you can accept these principles, you can take them with confidence because Christ has given me unusual mercy. He has been unusually merciful to me in those inward graces which allow me to speak the truth.”

Now, let me summarize what he means by verse 25. “In regard to single daughters, I have no absolute command for every case. Every case is different. But through God’s grace, He has put me in a position to give you good advice, and that advice is believable, and you can take that advice and apply it to every situation.” Now let’s look at verse 26. “I suppose, therefore, that this good.” Stop there. And then go to the end of the verse, “I say that it is good for a man so to be.” “I suppose, therefore, that this is good.” Now, please, the word “suppose” is misleading again. The word “suppose” isn’t Paul saying, “Well, let’s see, I suppose” – no. *Nomidzo* in the Greek means “I hold” or “I consider.” It is not a guess, but a conviction. “I hold the conviction that this is good.” What is good? That it is good for a man so to be. So to be what? A virgin, unmarried, and here he adds the concept of a man to the feminine form in verse 25. “It is good to be unmarried. It is good to be single,” he’s saying. “It is good to be an unmarried virgin.”

And we’ve seen that idea already in 7:1 and in 7:8. Twice there he says it’s good to be single. To be single isn’t wrong, if you have the gift, and that’s why it’s ludicrous for the church to make misjudgments on single people, and I think especially in our day today when there is just a plethora of information coming out about the family. The family is fine, and we must concentrate on the family, and there’s a proper emphasis there. Obviously, it’s a high, high emphasis that has to be made, but at the same time there must be the balance and consideration of what it is to be single and still have identity and acceptance on an equal basis in spiritual life as anybody who’s married – and not to be particularly thought abnormal. If you have the gift, it is a good thing – don’t seek to marry. It is a good thing to remain single.

Now, that’s Paul’s advice and it comes from the Holy Spirit. Now, Paul then supports that idea with five reasons for remaining single. We’ll just go as far as we can this morning and see where we get. Reason number one for staying single – and some of you who are married may identify with these and look back and say, “I knew that I should have stayed single.” Others of you who are very concerned about the social pressure to get married may realize that that social pressure is just that, social pressure, and not the Will of God, and you’ll reconsider that pursuit in your life. For whatever purposes God has, we’ll pray that He’ll make application to your life.

All right, number one reason to stay single is the pressure of the system. The pressure of the system. Notice verse 26: “I suppose, therefore, that this is good.” What is good? That it is good for a man so to be. To be what? To be unmarried. Why? Because of the present distress. Do you see it in the middle of verse 26? Because of the present distress. On account of the immediate necessity, might be a more literal translation. On account of the immediate necessity. Because of the present distress.

Now, the word *ananke* here has a secondary meaning, which I think is very helpful in explaining the passage, and that is that it means violence. And the apostle Paul is saying – incidentally, it is used to speak of violence and it is translated best that way in Luke 21:23, there talking of the violence of the Great Tribulation. It refers to violence in 1 Thessalonians 3:7, 2 Corinthians 6:4, and 2 Corinthians 12:10. The same word refers to violence and is best translated violence. Well, here, I think that that is also the best translation. It is better to be single because of the immediate violence. And what do you mean by this? Well, Kittel says that this denotes the tensions that exist between the new creation in Christ and the old cosmos. Tracing the use of this word through the New Testament, Kittel comes up with the idea that when a person becomes a Christian, he immediately gets into a violent conflict with the system.

Now, Paul is speaking of the violence and the distress and the pain and the suffering that can come to anyone who confesses Christ. It is difficult to be a Christian, Paul is saying, and it is especially difficult to be a married Christian because of the distress and the violence of the system. Now, Paul had had many experiences that would help us to understand this. Paul would go into a town and they would beat him. He would go into another town and they would stone him. He would go into another town and they would give him stripes with a whip. He would go into another town and they would put him in jail. On and on and on through the man's life there was pain and suffering, pain and suffering. Now, can you imagine the intensity with which that problem would be magnified if the apostle Paul had had a dear wife at home and a group of little apostles running around the house? Well, that would have been much more complicated, and everything that Paul endured, he would have had in the back of his mind, "But if it happens to me, then who takes care of my wife? And who takes care of my children? And how can I keep doing this while my wife sits home in fear and the constant edge of heartbreak and my children in fear that their father will never return? I must be home, taking care of them, nurturing them, raising them. That's my primary obligation."

You see, in the violence of the world in which Paul lived, marriage was a terrible encumbrance to somebody who was a Christian, at least in the sense of the ministry that he had. The Corinthian Christians could well remember what the Corinthian Jews had try to do to Paul the very time he came to their city.

Now, Paul is saying because of the – notice this, the present or the immediate violence. Paul is anticipating something here. There is a violence that is going to come when the wholesale pagan persecution breaks out, and Paul can see it coming. He knew that a girl married/a guy married and raising children might suffer the heartbreaking losses that can only come to those who have a family when the persecution broke out. He knew from his own life, as I said, that it was good that no wife and no children needed to weep and live with broken, fearful hearts every time he went somewhere. Hard times were coming to the church and Paul was aware of it. The change in the pagan attitude toward Christians was in the wind. You say, "Well, how did he know?" Well, in the first place, Jesus had predicted it. In John chapter 15, Jesus said as much when he promised the disciples that they were going to suffer persecution. "If the world hate you, you know it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

"Now the world hates you" – pretty clear. Down in 16 verse 1, he says, "Don't be surprised when you're offended. They'll put you out of the synagogues. The time comes that whosoever kills you will think he does God service." Jesus predicted it would come. Paul could see it on the horizon. For example, let me just give you a little history. The first fearful persecution broke out under Nero. Historians tell us that the barbarities inflicted on the Christians during that first persecution were such as excited the sympathy of even the Romans themselves. Nero refined cruelty upon cruelty and continued all manner and style of persecution. He had some Christians sewn up in the skins of wild beasts and then turned over to dogs to be torn into pieces. Others, he dressed in garments that were made stiff with wax. He fixed those people to trees and then lit them like candles to light his garden. This occurred throughout the early centuries of the Roman Empire. Erastus, according to Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, was one of those martyred in the first persecution, and Erastus was the chamberlain or the treasurer of the city of Corinth. What that tells us is that the persecution of Nero extended to Corinth and took the life of one of the men named in the Bible, one of the Christians of Corinth.

Now, Paul knew that this was coming to Corinthians. He could see it on the horizon and in view of this, he says, "My advice is, if you have the gift, stay single." And people, keep in mind that all of this advice is only to those who have the gift because to force somebody to be single who doesn't have the gift is to force them to burn with desire all their life, and that isn't accomplishing anything. But if you have the gift, he is saying – that is the basic supposition of all of this – don't get married. Because of the pressure that is coming, the pressure of the system against the believer. Verse 27? "Are you bound to a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Seek not to be bound." In other words, "I'm not saying get unmarried. I don't want any misunderstanding there – don't divorce your wife." In fact, in verse 10, he says: "Let not the wife depart from her husband." Whatever the distress was, the married must endure it. But if you have a choice, and you have the gift, don't seek marriage. Stay the way you are, verse 27 is saying.

The question that comes to mind here is: How does this translate into 1976? Keep in mind that Paul is talking about those who have the gift. We have people today who have the gift of singleness. What does it mean to them to know the present distress? The pressure of the system? Are we facing in our world a time of distress? Are we facing in our world a time of violence like they did then? Are we facing a time of persecution? Some say we are. According to our Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25, in his teaching on the Mount of Olives regarding the end time, he said the end of the age would be characterized by war, cold and hot war, be characterized by famine, disease, earthquake, and persecution. And certainly the worst of that would come to pass in the period known as the Great Tribulation, after the church is taken out of the world. But it seems apparent that some of those things are fast becoming a reality before the rapture of the church. Overpopulation, pollution, crime, immorality, false prophets, terrible sin – all kinds of things are already on the horizon and are unavoidable in our lifetime, and if Paul was right when he wrote Timothy that evil men will get worse and worse, then it can only get worse. And he was right. At best it is an insecure and explosive world.

There is an interesting book entitled, *The Year 2000*, written by Herman Kahn and Anthony Wiener, and in it, this is what they predict for the year 2000. It sounds like they've been reading Matthew 24 except they're not Christians. This is what they predict: Invasion and war, civil strife and revolution, famine, disease, persecution by despotism – that is, by dictatorship – national disasters and a depression or economic stagnation, *et cetera*. Those are the predictions of those people who look at the world analytically, and that's precisely what Matthew 24 says.

It's a rough world and being married only complicates it greatly because of the problem of caring for your wife and husband and caring for your children. So Paul says it's a pressure world. All of the end time, from the time Jesus first arrived until His return, all of that time is a pressure system, set against the Christian. We are to anticipate suffering through all that time, the hatred of the world, and so Paul says if you have the gift and you don't burn with desire, physically and sexually, if the Spirit of God has given you the gift of singleness, then be content, because of the pressure of the system that is here and will yet come in a more fearful display of violence in the future. And I think all of us would agree that for the Christian, the nearer we get to the end, the higher the price to pay for our faith. That has to be true. If evil men do get worse and worse and if apostasy runs wild and if the mystery of iniquity is already working and moving toward the evil of the tribulation, then Satan is going to battle all the more stringently and strongly toward the end and persecution will rise, and many will pay high prices, and he's saying if you're single, just stay that way, if you have the gift. You have less encumbrances.

A second thing: Stay single, number one, because of the pressure of the system set against Christianity. Number two, because of the problems of the flesh. Remain single because of the problems of the flesh. Now, verse 28 identifies this for us. "And if thou marry, thou hast not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned." He wants to make sure we understand that it isn't a sin to get married. That is not what he is saying. He doesn't want any misunderstanding. He is not against marriage. Marriage is not an evil thing, marriage is not a sinful thing. It is still the majority state, it is still the design of God, it is still a beautiful thing, it is still a wholesome thing. "Don't misunderstand me. If you marry, you don't sin, and if a virgin marries, she doesn't sin." So bachelors and maiden daughters can marry without sinning. "Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh and I would spare you from that." "Such would have trouble in the flesh and I'd spare you from that."

Now, this is very interesting. Notice the statement, "Such shall have trouble in the flesh." "Such" is masculine in its gender and that would gather up all cases, not just virgins but bachelors as well. "Trouble" – that's an interesting word. Do you know one of the things that occurs when you get married? Trouble. Trouble occurs in marriage. You say, "Oh, in our marriage?" Yes. In your – in my marriage. "Can't believe it." It's true. Trouble occurs. You say, "Well, where does it come from?" Trouble comes from what? The flesh. Do you know what we have realized in our marriage? Both of us are sinners.

My wife is a sinner. Now, I'm not getting specific, but I'm just giving you general truth. My wife is a sinner. You know what's even worse than that? I am a sinner. And you know what happens when you put two sinners together? Trouble happens. And then when you have a whole lot of little sinners come into your house – every one of our children are depraved. Have you recognized that about your children? You know, we were talking about Melinda yesterday. Melinda is especially depraved, and she is – she's only two, but do you know that a first response to any difficult situation is to lie? Just automatically lie. And now I'm in the process of trying to teach her that that isn't the approach. It's just automatic. Well, we have six people in our house, all of whom are totally depraved. Now, you know what that spells? Trouble. Trouble in the flesh. Any kind of marriage is going to bring about trouble. Now, "flesh" – what does "flesh" mean? – *sarx*. This is the lower nature.

Now, let me give you a simple definition. This is our humanness. This is our humanness. And it is humanness in marriage that makes for trouble. Even though the Holy Spirit wants perfect unity, humanness creates problems. He has in mind the problems that come from our humanness, the ever-present troubles of married life. Now, what about this idea of trouble? This is the word *thlipsis* in the Greek and it means literally "pressure." It comes from a Greek word meaning "to press together" and was used of squashing grapes. Now, you know marriage is a pressure, isn't it? It's a pressing together. And, in that kind of pressing together, humanness is going to rear its head.

You know the kind of trouble that humanness brings? Let me tell you some of the things that humanness creates. Anger. You ever have anger in your marriage? In your home? Oh, it comes now and then. Selfishness. You ever have that? How about stupidity? "Whatever made you do that?" "How could anybody overdraw the bank account by that much?" Just plain stupidity. That's humanness. And the other partner says, "Boy, you know, how do I know what you've done with everything else? Now I can't trust you with that," you know? Forgetfulness. "This is the third year you've forgotten my birthday." That creates problems. Dishonesty. You don't tell the truth. Secret sin. Pride. Pride makes us build ego walls and then people can't get to us, then the communication is cut off, see? Thoughtlessness. Overindulgence.

You know, in a home, people say, "Well, if I could just get married, that would solve my problems." My friend, if you get married, all that's going to do is magnify your problems so somebody else has to live with them. And that's humanness and that's part of the problem of being married. And that's why the most miserable people in the world are not single. Did you get that? The most miserable people in the world are married. In a marriage that doesn't work, Paul Sailhamer says – and I quote – "The only thing worse than waiting is wishing you had." Misery comes, basically, in marriage at a much higher level than in being single because you're slammed against this other person, and everything about you that's wrong keeps getting thrown back in your face, and you're constantly having to adjust. All marriages have difficulty. They're just plain trouble in the flesh. Hardships, sacrifice, because two people are human and children are human, and they add more depravity to the scene and it all becomes complex. If God has given you the gift of singleness, stay that way and avoid the problems of humanness that come in a marriage. Don't look at marriage as the solution to your problems – it is the magnification of them.

You know, we always say marriage never changes anything, it just intensifies everything you are and makes somebody else have to live with it. If you're going to solve your problems, you're going to solve them apart from your marriage. I've had people say, "You know, I've got this tremendous sexual problem and desires and it's to the place of sinfulness. If I could only get married." You know what happens when they get married? Nothing changes that. They still have those same lusts and evil desires, even though there is a sexual fulfillment in marriage, if that thing is a sin problem that hasn't been dealt with, there will be just as much illicit lust in the marriage as there was before you got married. And other people say, "Well, I'm so lonely. If only I could – if I could just get married and have somebody. And you know what? There are plenty of somebodies in the world that you could know and love and not be lonely, and usually a super lonely person will get married and draw walls around themselves and be super lonely even though they're married and they'll make somebody else lonely.

Marriage is not the solution to your problems. Marriage is the solution to one thing for the Christian, and only one, and that is the need to be obedient to God's Will. If God wants you married, then get married – to the right person. Only if that's clearly God's Will. But, if you have the gift of singleness, you avoid the special problems of the flesh that come with marriage as well as the pressure of the system.

Third thing. The third reason for remaining single is the passing of the world. Pressure of the system, the problems of the flesh, and the passing of the world. Look at verse 29. Now, I'm going to read 29 to 31 because it all goes together: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short." Literally, the time is shortened. The time is shortened. "It remains that both they that have wives be as though they had none. They that weep as though they wept not. They that rejoice as though they rejoiced not. They that buy as though they possess not, and they that use this world as not abusing it, for the schema" – the state of this world – "is passing away." Now, what is he saying here? He is saying, "Hey, marriage is part of the schema of this world, and it is" – what? – "passing away." Marriage has no relation – listen to this. Marriage has no relation to permanent eternal interests.

I know this bothers a lot of young people because they get married – a couple asked me this recently, brand new newlyweds, and they said, "If the Lord comes real soon, will we still be married in heaven?" I said, "No." That was very disappointing. They did not like that thought. And of course there are others who have been married a long time who are waiting for the rapture because they'll cease to be married. But, marriage, there is no marriage in heaven. Not at all. I know the Mormons

have a very sophisticated complex deal about eternal marriages – it's just so much hogwash. There are no marriages in heaven.

Marriage is a part of this passing scheme. That's what he's saying. It is like human emotion. It is like human possessions. It is like human pleasures. It's all part of this system and gone. The time is shortened, *kairos*, the appointed time. *Kairos* means the set time, the appointed time. God has set out an appointed time. It is shortened, it is rolled up. The allotted time in this world is brief. James said your life is a vapor, right? It appears for a little time and vanishes away. Who is able to say what about tomorrow? Why, who knows what tomorrow's going to bring? What is your life? Brief. A brief, flickering candle that is gone with the first breath of God's divine wind.

James 1:10 says, "The rich, in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away. For the sun has no sooner risen with a burning heat but it withers the grass, its flower falls. The grace of the fashion of it perishes, so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." Life is short even for the rich. In 1 Peter 1:24: "All flesh is like grass, the glory of man like the flower of the grass, the grass withers and the flower falls away." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, for the world passes away." 1 John 2:15-17.

You see, marriage is a part of a passing system. If you have a gift for singleness, then that's part of the passing system you don't need. It is God's design, people, and this is what it's saying here. It is God's design that we attach lightly to earthly things. That those who are married, even, be as though they were not married. In other words, it doesn't mean you mistreat your wife or you don't fulfill your obligation, no, no – the Bible is clear about that – but it is that you remember that it is the reality that is eternal that matters. Colossians 3:2 adds a word that I think is important. Love your wives, husbands. But listen to what Colossians 3:2 says: "Set your affections on things" – what? – "above, and not on things on the earth." You can love your wife and at the same time keep your priorities and your perspectives in the proper way.

Now, Paul gives five examples here of the Christian's freedom from the passing world: marriage, weeping, rejoicing, buying, and worldly pleasure. They're all part of the passing system. Marriage, for example, he says – in verse 29 – "it remains that those who have wives be as though they had none." Don't attach yourselves totally to marriage. That's just part of the passing world. Luis Palau was saying that, you know, one of the things that's so difficult today in the world is that people have become so super-attached in marriage that you can't get them to do anything in serving the Lord. He says, "Sometimes on the mission field, we try to get a couple of missionaries to go maybe on a month special mission and they don't want to go because they don't want to leave their wives, they say." And he says, "There's got to be a balance here." There's got to be some kind of balance between love your wife and care for your family, on the one hand, and we've really pushed that to the limits, and on the other hand recognizing that marriage is to be treated lightly as an earthly thing. And that what we do for eternal values is what's really consequential.

Listen, marriage is going to give way to heavenly family life with God the Father, Christ the husband, and all believers the wife, right? You say, "Well, what does he mean by weeping?" "And they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice, as though they rejoice not." What he's saying is, don't get attached to human emotion either. Don't rise and fall with what's going on in your world. Don't be overburdened by what happens. You know, there are some people, for example, somebody in their family dies and they crack up. They fall apart. They're worthless. That's ridiculous for a

Christian. Why? Because that's just a temporal thing. You're going to spend all eternity with them anyway. How ridiculous it is, for so often when a wife loses a husband, she just folds up her tent and steals away into the night. That's the end of her. Or a man loses his wife and it's all over with. He can't adjust himself. Why? Because he has not treated marriage lightly, and he can't control the weeping that comes. Don't get overdone with human emotion.

Listen, when we get to heaven, God's going to wipe away all tears. What about rejoicing? Well, what he means there is don't get too happy with the system either. Don't get overjoyed with what makes the world happy. Do not be a victim of the world's emotion, that's what he's saying. Don't get over-tied to the world's relationships and don't get over-tied to the world's emotion. You're an otherworldly creature.

Now, what about the fourth one, buying, at the end of verse 30? "They that buy as though they possess not." Don't get over-occupied with the world's commodities. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," 1 John 2:15 says, and he's simply saying, "Look, you're in the world, and you're going to be a part of it, but tie loosely to its relationships, loosely to its emotions, and loosely to its commodities." Listen to me people. That third one is a tough one, isn't it? I'm telling you, some of us have got almost every single thing in this world that we have financially and almost all of our mental preoccupation tied in to the world's commodities. We're more worried about our bank account than we are about our spiritual life. We're more worried about how we decorate our houses and how fancy our cars are than we are about spiritual realities and eternal truths, and we are not attached lightly to the world; we are attached heavily to the system. And so when the system begins to crack add we begin to lose things, we can't handle it. Set your affections on things above. Marriage is a passing thing. Human emotion is a passing thing. Human commodities are passing things.

Lastly, he talks about human pleasure, and that's using the world, in verse 31. That is describing human pleasure, worldly pleasure. Worldly pleasure – some of us live for worldly pleasure. Live to have a good time. Live to do this and to do that and to travel here and to go here, and we're so busy enjoying everything in this world that we can't be much use to God. We talk so much about leisure and, you know, we all need to rest once in a while. We talk about retirement. We talk about "We've got to get away," and we want to see things and do things and enjoy – our life is so short.

Listen people. I wonder whether the apostle Paul really looked at life like that. Life is not ever to be the for Christian a constant vacation. It's not just to be worldly pleasure. We are to spend ourselves on those things that are going to have eternal consequences. I'd rather die at 40 and have used my life for God than live to 80 having done nothing. I think it matters that we invest ourselves in God's kingdom. And he's saying, attach lightly to the preoccupation of the world. Well, it's very difficult to divorce ourselves. You know, we're getting sold a bill of goods about go here and see this and see that and buy this vehicle so you can travel here and go here and do this and look at this wonderful new pleasure and this will make your life more comfortable, and we get really wrapped up in that whole preoccupation with pleasure. Paul is emphasizing the passing things of life, one of which is marriage, and he says the fashion or the schema, the external present state of things, is in the process of passing away.

Now, notice what his conclusion is – verse 31: Don't abuse it. What does he mean? Don't overdo your identification with the world. Use the world but don't use it to excess. Be merry and enjoy your marriage and love your wife and give yourself to one another, and do all you can to make that

marriage everything, but don't let it get out of perspective so that all of a sudden it becomes everything, and you're not any use to God. And it's fine to be sympathetic. Paul says weep for those that weep – in Romans 12:15 – and he says rejoice with those that rejoice, rejoice always, he says in Philippians. And it's fine to have all of these things, but don't ever let them get beyond, don't overdo it – that's what he means, abuse it. Because a new schema is coming – a new world. Don't overvalue human relations. Don't overvalue emotion, possession, pleasure, above its true worth. Listen to me – marriage can be a detraction from spiritual reality. Sorrow can be a distraction from spiritual reality. I've known some people so sorrowing, so sad, that they can't even enjoy the experience of the Holy Spirit. So can joy, so can possessions, so can pleasure.

Listen, the sons and daughters of the King should deal with marriage under the limitations of their relation to the King, whatever He wills. You should never pursue marriage outside the government of God, and you should never abuse it so that it becomes the preoccupation. Concentrate on the eternal.

Now, what's Paul saying? This is easier to do when you're single. It's easier when you're single. Why? Because you have not that potential sorrow of the death of somebody that you love in your family. You have not that preoccupation with marital life and family life. You have not that preoccupation with purchasing goods that everybody in your family wants. You know, one of the ways that Satan tempts me to materialism is through everybody in my family. "Uh, Dad, I want this." "Daddy, can I have this?" "Honey, why can't we get that?" And then I say it sometimes, say, "I think we ought to get" – and everybody's coming at it from all the commodities angle.

And it gets – my son wants a pair of shoes the other day. I mean he didn't want any pair of shoes; he wanted a pair of shoes like he wanted. But I couldn't find them. After I had spent about three hours looking for a pair of shoes, I said, "This is infringing on the time for the work of the kingdom." He says, "Huh?" I said, "What's with the pair of shoes? Who needs it, right? Just get something on your feet. We don't care." "No, Dad, I've got to have the pair of shoes...." Praise the Lord, I found them and I found them for \$11.99. But it's very hard when you're married to not be encumbered by the kind of things that are temporal and spend so much of your time in that.

Listen, if you have the gift of singleness, use it. Praise God for it. It's exciting. Well, if you have that gift, stay single because of the pressure of the system. It's a violent world. It isn't easy to raise children in this world. It isn't easy to have a family to care for in this world. It's going to get worse. Because of the problems of the flesh, marriage is trouble, and it's trouble you don't need if God has gifted you to be single. And the world is passing anyway, and marriage is simply a temporal, passing relationship. And if God hasn't necessarily called you to it, there's no need for you to be married. You can just sidestep that one temporal thing and have that much more devotion for the Lord. Those are practical, aren't they? I'm not done, but I'll have to wait until next week. Let's pray.

Father, we know that you've given us in our congregation many with the gift of singleness and yet we know, Lord, that it isn't really singleness because they're complete with you. They're really fulfilled and maybe much more so than some married people, who are married, and because of all the anxiety of that marriage, unable to really experience the fulfillment that you intend for them. I thank you for single people who have been able to give themselves wholly to you throughout the years of the kingdom on earth in the form that it's been, faithful missionaries, teachers, workers, even in our own congregation, who have that unusual gift to remain single, devoted to you in a special way. Help us as parents, Lord, to look first maybe for that area in the lives of our children and see if they have

that gift, if that's not the way that they should go, and challenge them and encourage them to use it, to fulfill the potential that is there. Lord, I want to say thank you this morning, too, for one other thing, and that is for the privilege of studying a Scripture that hits us at every aspect of life and leaves us with instruction to cover every area. Thank you, Father, for knowing where the problems would come, anticipating them, giving us your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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