Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Marriage, Divorce, and Singleness
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:1-40
Code: 80-359

Open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and we're going to do something that I don't do very often, we're going to cover 40 verses tonight. So you're going to have to stay with us on this and this is going to be a very, very rich experience.

We have looked the last two Sunday mornings at Mark chapter 10 at our Lord's teaching on the subject of marriage and divorce. And we now come to the Apostle Paul who helps us with some of the implications of what our Lord taught. And actually, he even expands on what our Lord taught and let me show you something of the essence of this by pointing out a few verses in chapter 7.

Verse 10, "To the married, I give instructions, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband." Paul is saying, "I'm going to tell you something that doesn't come only from me, but it comes from the Lord." So he's referring back to the teaching of the Lord.

However, in verse 12 he says, "This time to the rest, I say, not the Lord." He doesn't mean that this isn't from heaven, he doesn't mean it's not inspired, he simply means I am not quoting our Lord this time, referring in verse 10 back to the fact that God hates divorce and our Lord affirmed that, as we saw in Mark 10, I'm giving you instructions that come directly from the Lord. Here he says, "This doesn't come directly from the Lord, but I say if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her." Now he's gone beyond the teaching of the Lord into new areas of divine revelation. No less from God, but just not quoting the Lord.

Verse 25, concerning virgins. "I have no command of the Lord." I can't go back and quote Jesus on this, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. This is coming from me, but you can count on it because God has mercifully enabled me to speak the truth. And even at the end of the chapter in the final verse, he says, "I consider that I also have the Spirit of God." This is not coming from me, but it is rather coming from the Holy Spirit.

So at not point in this chapter does Paul intend to say that I'm going to be teaching you something that the Lord is not speaking about. He is simply saying I am teaching you something that I cannot find in the precise scriptural record of the teaching of Jesus. It is no less from the Spirit, it is no less trustworthy.

Now as you work through these 40 verses, the best way, I think, to do this is to understand that he's dealing with the Corinthian church. And in the Corinthian church there were all kinds of issues, as you know, and marriage was one of them, marital status was a huge, huge issue. And apparently, as so often in the epistles of Paul, he is answering specific questions that have been brought up to him and trying to clarify things that the people need to know. His teaching is equal to the teaching of Jesus. It is inspired, it is in no way inferior, it is in every sense binding and authoritative on us, but not all of it comes specifically and directly from Jesus. The background, however, of what he's doing here is the Corinthian chaos. People in the Corinthian church didn't come out of a Jewish background so they didn't have an Old Testament view of marriage and divorce, even a convoluted one like the Jews we talked about today. They came out of paganism. They came out of godlessness and worldliness and myriad marital problems and entanglements and misunderstandings existed.

For example, here would be a typical scenario that would exist in the Corinthian church with a whole group of converted Gentiles. Rome had no uniform marriage law. They would be under the influence of the Roman Empire. And the Empire contained, for example, many slaves and many of the believers were slaves. A marriage in the strict and legal sense did not even exist for slaves. A master could allow what was called contabairnium, or literally, tent companionship, living together we would say. This was entered by slaves without a ceremony and could be ended if the master chose to end it and at any point he could sell one of the slaves and that would virtually end it anyway. It is like today's "live in" sex partners.

Since many early Christians were slaves, it is very likely that they had lived in such unions in the past, and maybe in multiple unions, and maybe even in the present. Now what? What's their status?

Beyond the slaves, for the common people, there was a custom called U.S.U.S., U S U S, that specified if a woman had dwelt with a man for a year, she was his wife. That would be what we call common-law marriage, only in America I think it's seven years. Another way of marrying for common people was called *co-emptio in manum,* marriage by sale. You went to a man who was a little low on cash and you bought his daughter. This is a rather traditional way, kind of the dowry and the father would sell his daughter to a husband with money.

Now if you get beyond the common people, you get to the upper classes and the noble people and a little more of the elite folks, they had marriage called *congfariatio*, they actually had a ceremony...the noble people. They had a joining of right hands. They said vows. They prayed prayers to Jupiter and to Juno, they had rings, by the way, they had rings and you could find in ancient Roman literature the fact that they cut up a cadaver and somebody named Allus Alias cut up cadavers and said that there was a nerve that ran from the third finger on the left hand directly to the heart. And so the ring should be put on the third finger of the left hand. That was part of the ceremony. They had wreaths, veils, flowers and cake. So guess where your wedding came from, an old Roman tradition picked up by the Roman Catholic Church and standardized.

The moral character of life in the Roman world and life around Corinth was low. Divorce was high where marriage even existed. And with the slaves where marriage really didn't exist, the changing of partners was a rather constant issue and even the common people in their sort of informal covenants together broke them and went to other people.

On top of that, immorality was rampant. In fact, you can find in the literature that the Romans had wives for the cooking and the care of the house, and concubines for their sexual needs. Concubinage was everywhere, fornication was everywhere, adultery was rampant. It was a horrible world.

There was even a Woman's Liberation Movement. Jerome Carcopino has a wonderful little book, if you can ever find one, it's called *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* in which he goes back and digs out all the history of these things and he says there was a Woman's Liberation Movement around biblical times in which quote: "Some women were not content to live their lives by their husband's side, but carried on another life without him."

Another writer says, "What modesty can you expect in a woman who wears a helmet, hates her own sex, and delights in feats of strength? We have some of those in our society. The same writer, Juvenal, says, "Thus does she lord it over her husband but before long, she vacates her kingdom, flits from one house to another wearing out her bridal veil," end quote, by overuse.

So marriage in Paul's day is a disaster, like in our day, chaotic. And, of course, among the Corinthians now that have come to Christ and they have been taught the standard of one man/one woman for life in a true covenant, a real covenant, a public covenant before God and before others, they have all kinds of questions. And the questions are the best way to break down this chapter.

Now there are always those people who come up with the idea of no marriage, no sexual relationships at all. That would be like Mother Ann Lee who was the mother of no one, of course, since she didn't believe in having any relationship with a man. She started a group called The Shakers, that quickly went out of existence, for obvious reasons. And they had this notion that any kind of physical relationship was evil and wicked and sinful and that took care of their operation pretty fast, really.

So the first question that we could sort of form as we jump into this chapter, and this must be behind what is going on as the chapter opens, is to ask the question: Are normal physical relationships between a man and a woman somehow wrong? Are they unspiritual?

Let's start...chapter 7 verse 1, "Now concerning the things about which you wrote," and that's why we believe these are questions that need to be answered because he's referring directly to something that was written and sent to him, the Apostle Paul, "concerning the things about which you wrote."

And you can imagine what was in that letter based upon the history that I just described to you, based upon the culture.

So, first, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. That's a euphemism for sexual relationships, it is good, it's okay. It's good not to have sexual relationships. That is to say, it's not evil. It's good. It falls within the realm of goodness, *kalos*. It's okay. Celibacy is all right. It's honorable. It's excellent. It's all right not to marry. It's all right to stay single. It's all right never to do that.

But, verse 2, "The general rule, however, because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife and each woman is to have her own husband." Why? Because of what? Immoralities. You say, "I want to stay single all my life." Huh, well, singleness is good if it is not the cause of sexual sin. The general rule is to get married. The reason is simple, because of temptation, because of temptation. There is no place for fornication...that's the word that's translated immoralities in the NAS. The fact of life is that if you try to stay single, as good as celibacy can be, marriage is the norm and marriage is better if being single results in temptation.

I want you to know that Paul doesn't say get married because you find somebody that you like. He says, really get married because you're running at a very high risk of life if you don't.

There are six reasons for marriage that I jotted down. Procreation, Genesis 1:28; pleasure, Hebrews 13:4, the bed is not defiled, it's undefiled, pleasure; purity, right here; provision, you take a wife in order that you might protect her and care for her and nourish her as the Lord does the church; partnership, not good to be alone, you need a helper; and picture, a picture of Christ in the church. But right in the middle of that is this notion of purity. Each man is to have his own wife and each woman is to have her own husband. Verse 3, "The husband then must fulfill his duty to his wife and likewise also the wife to her husband."

So Paul is saying, there are some people saying, "Well, shall we just stay single? Shall we just be celibate? Should we see sex as evil...why would they say that? Because it mostly was in their world. It was just immorality everywhere, fornication everywhere, adultery everywhere all the time by everybody. And so, some of them think they're taking the noble high ground and saying, "You know, maybe we just don't do that at all," because it was a pornographic culture, it was a debased culture.

You know, it's nothing new for that to be the conclusion that people make in a time of debase living. I think there were many mediaeval monks who made that conclusion, that the high ground was to be celibate. They were seeing sexual relationships of any kind in any relationship as some kind of a defilement. Paul says, "Look, it's okay to be single, it's okay to live without any relationships with the opposite sex, but it's a whole lot better to marry because of immoralities. And then when you do marry, you have the duty to fulfill to each other." That duty, obviously, is to render the physical affection that is consistent and God-ordained for the procreation and the pleasure of people in a

marriage.

In fact, the duty is so high in a marriage that the wife doesn't even have authority over her own body, the husband does. And likewise, the husband doesn't have authority over his own body but the wife does. So, stop depriving one another. Paul says that's not what God is asking. You look at the culture you live in and the history that you've come from in the past and all of that and maybe you want to say this, the high ground, the noble ground in this sex-saturated, sex-mad culture is to just say, "I'll never do that, I'm going to live a life of complete abstinence and this is the level of purity, Paul says, that's good, that's not wrong, that's not bad. But for most people, that's going to lead to immorality, so have your own wife, have your own husband and fulfill your duties to each other. And do not deprive each other of that."

Unless...verse 5, "By agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer." If there is some exigency in your life, some trauma in your life, some issue in your life which much like fasting from food, consumes you with sadness and sorrow, these kinds of things flee your mind. You agree to that. But come together again." Why? "So that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." Don't do that. You give Satan opportunity.

So the opposite is true. You think that you'll be more pure by withholding that. The truth is, you're going to go right down the path that Satan wants you to go into sin cause you're going to be tempted because of your inability to exercise self-control. Get married for the sake of purity and when you're married, fulfill your marriage covenant physically, do not deprive each other except for some great spiritual cause and come back together again so that you don't put yourself in a position that Satan would tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Now Paul says this in verse 6, "I say this by way of concession, not of command. Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that."

What he is saying is, "Look, celibacy is a gift, it's a gift. And I'm just conceding the fact, not commanding it. I can't command celibacy because that wouldn't be right. But I would by way of concession say, 'I wish you were like me,'" which is to say that he's...what?...is not married. Was he ever married? Most of us think he was because he was a member of the Sanhedrin and you had to be married to be a member of the Sanhedrin. What happened to his wife? Who knows, we don't know. We don't think he left her at home and took off for the rest of his life. So he..probably lost his wife in death. He says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, "A man has a right to lead about a wife," has that right. But Paul did not exercise that right. And it was based upon the fact that each man has his own gift from God. And this is what we talk about the gift of singleness...the gift of singleness. And that is a gift.

If you drop down to verse 32, “I want you to be free from concern, one who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord, but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world how he may please his wife and his interests are divided,” verse 34. So there are some benefits to being single. If you have been given by God the gift, each man has his own gift. Celibacy is a gift and you remember the disciples back in Matthew 19? We read that today, “The disciples said to Jesus after His teaching on divorce, ‘It’s better not to get married.’” And what did Jesus say? “But not all men can handle that. Not everybody can handle that.”

It’s okay. It’s good. It’s honorable. It has great potential to keep you single-minded and focused. But it’s a gift, it’s a unique gift. The gift is best known by those who feel strong, complete comfort in being single and no strong desire for a partner, for an intimate partner, a life partner. It’s an option. But please don’t conclude that there’s anything wrong with a God-given gift of physical intimacy. Singleness, the last thing that God wants out of singleness is sexual promiscuity. Be single if that’s not a problem. If that’s a problem, get married.

All right, the next question on their mind, probably on that letter he got from them, “Should the formerly married remarry?” And verse 8 is where he starts to talk about this, shifting gears, “But I say to the unmarried and to widows,” these would be two categories of formerly married people. A widow is someone whose spouse died, right? Everybody knows that, it’s universally understood. But who are unmarried people? Well they can’t be widows because it’s the unmarried and the widows.

Now there are only two ways that you can be married and then not be married. You either were widowed or you were divorced. That has to be what that means. So to those who have been divorced, called the unmarried, and to widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I. The unmarried are the formerly married, the *agamos*, *gamos* the married idea, and then *a* the alpha privative, divorced people. Verse 11, “If she leaves, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.” Again the same meaning has to be in view. Down in verse 34, you have the unmarried and the virgin. The unmarried aren’t the widows and the unmarried aren’t the virgins. So who are the unmarried? They have to be the people who were married and now are no longer married.

So formerly married people, now single by death, widows, or single by divorce, unmarried, what does Paul say? Verse 8, “Well, it’s good, again it’s good to be single, so it’s good to stay single.” It’s good so that you can serve, so that you can be free as verses 32, 33 and 34 were pointed out to you.

But, look at verse 9, “If they do not have self-control, let them...what?...marry. It’s better to marry than to burn.” Not burn in hell, but burn with desire. It’s fine. You were married, now you’re single, be single, stay single, stay focused, live your life that way. That is preferable. I think that’s great advice from the Apostle Paul, great advice.

But if you need to be married, if that's a problem physically, get married. And you remember in 1 Timothy 5:14, the Apostle Paul makes this very clear when he's talking about widows there. He says, "I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, give the enemy no occasion for a reproach, for some have already turned aside to follow Satan." You don't' want a lot of young widows with all their desires being vulnerable to evil things around them. Stay single if you're able. Paul was able and he was focused and he was give that gift. It indicates that God can give that gift even after marriage if He so desires. Be convinced that God has allowed your singleness for holy purposes...for holy purposes. Pour your life in to the Kingdom.

This is picked up in verse 26, "I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife, don't seek to be released. If you're released from a wife, don't seek a wife. If you can handle that, it's good because it's tough in the world. And the world they lived in was like the world we live in. But if you do marry, you haven't sinned and if a virgin marries, she hasn't sinned." They were asking those kinds of questions. Is it...this abstinence idea had apparently taken over. It's okay to marry, it's okay to stay single. Yet when you do, you'll have trouble in this life and I'm trying to spare you. If you can be single, it simplifies your life. It narrows down the realm of your trouble. You've got enough trouble with yourself, you marry somebody and now you've got two people, two sinners colliding and you have a bunch of children and you've got six sinners smashing in to each other and it just keeps going. There's something to be said for just one sinner. It lowers the level of conflict. However, this assumes that one can deal with that kind of situation.

And in verse 29 he even says, "The time has been shortened, so for now on those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they didn't weep, those who rejoice as though they didn't rejoice, those who buy although they didn't possess, those who use the world as though they didn't make full use of it for the form of this world is passing away." Paul is saying, if you can stay single, it simplifies your life and you can pour your solo life into the Kingdom. But you have to have a gift to do that or it just becomes a horrendous means of temptation.

So the question then is, is sexual activity unspiritual? No. Singleness is good. Marriage is good, if you don't have the gift of singleness. Should the formerly married remarry? Yes if they desire to be married because it's better to be married than to burn. But if you can be single, be single and focus on the Kingdom.

Another question apparently is raised here, what are the alternatives for those who are married? What are the alternatives for those who are married? Now understand what happens, maybe a wife comes to hear the gospel, she believes in the gospel, she is saved and now she's got an unconverted husband. Is she in a situation where she is unequally yoked together with an unbeliever? Is she having a relationship with a person who is part of the kingdom of Satan? Is this Christ with Belial, you

know, in the language of Paul in the 2 Corinthian letter? Is she...is this light and darkness joined together? Is this sin and righteousness joined together? They were asking these kinds of questions. And, of course, the Lord's teaching was no divorce.

So the question comes, what alternatives for those that are married? Verse 10, "To the married, those of you who are married," now before he was talking to those who were...what? Single. If you can stay single, it's good, but it's better to marry if that's what you need. Now he's going to talk to the married. "I give instructions, but not I but the Lord," and here this is directly from the Lord, Matthew 5; Matthew 19; Mark 10; the wife shouldn't leave her husband. Why? Because God hates divorce and because God joins together every couple. "What God has joined together, let not man separate." So he reiterates what the Lord taught. God hates divorce. Don't divorce. One man, one woman, in one union, the indivisible one for life, no separation.

Now you come to verse 12. "To the rest, I say, not the Lord, this is from me," the Lord hasn't got any instruction on this specifically, "If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him," this is the opposite situation. But in this case, this is a brother who has a wife and in this case she's the unbeliever but she wants to live with him. Should he divorce her just because she's an unbeliever? The answer, "No, he must not divorce her. And a woman, verse 13, who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband or divorce her husband."

Why? "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband, for otherwise your children are unclean but now they are holy."

What is that saying? That is saying, "Look, if your unbelieving partner loves you and wants to stay with you, you stay in that marriage." Why? "Because you become the sanctifying instrument in the life of that non-believer and in the children of that union because you are the one receiving the grace of God that is being poured out on your life that will spill over to those unbelieving people and to your husband or your wife and your children." Instead of the Christian, listen, being defiled by the unbeliever, the unbeliever is cleansed by the presence of the Christian.

We're not talking about salvation here. We're simply talking about the pure, wonderful blessings of God falling on a believer and spilling over to a non-believer and making a purer, cleaner, lovelier home. God pours out His blessings on His redeemed and on the children of His redeemed. So it's the opposite of what they were thinking. I need to shake that partner because he's a pagan, he'll defile me. No, you'll be the means of sanctifying influence on him.

However, verse 15 creates another scenario. "If the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave. Let him leave." Literally, if he takes himself out, that's the verb, if he eliminates himself, *chorizo*, technical

term really for divorce. “If an unbeliever divorces a believer, let him leave. The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases but God has called us to peace.” Here is the second exception for divorce. The first is adultery, we saw that in Matthew 19, Matthew 5. Second one is an unbeliever divorces a believer.

You are not under bondage. The bondage is broken, the bond is broken. You are no longer bound. Romans 7. The married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living. If her husband dies, she is released from that law. Same language here. If an unbeliever leaves, you are not bound.

What does that mean? The union has been broken, you no longer are bound by it which then assumes you have the right to remarry if a non-believer leaves because God has called us to peace and the blessings of peace are what God wants for His children.

You say, “Well, I think I’ll just hang on till the dying day. I think I’ll fight this guy all the way to the end. I think I’ll make it really impossible for him to divorce me because I want to see him saved.” Good. However, verse 16 is written for you. “How do you know...how do you know, O wife, whether you’ll save your husband?” That’s pretty practical, isn’t it? Marriage is not an evangelistic tool. It’s an evangelistic context, but don’t think that just by hanging on to this guy that some how you’re going to save him. How do you know whether you’ll save him? Or how do you know, husband, whether you’ll save your wife?

That’s not the point. You have no knowledge of that. When the unconverted person is determined to leave and seeks a divorce, you don’t need to perpetuate the tension and the frustration and the hatred and the animosity under some notion that you might be the only person on the planet who can be the instrument of salvation. That’s for God to decide.

Well the summary comes in verse 17 and this answers another question. “Should salvation change our marital status?” That’s kind of what we’ve been dealing with. “Only as the Lord has assigned to each one as God has called each in this manner, let him walk.”

Salvation doesn’t really change anything. Now that you’re a believer, you don’t have to give up sex, throw out your partner. It doesn’t change anything. If you...and he gives some illustrations and analogies, “Was any man called when he was already circumcised?” If you were saved when you were Jewish, you can stay that way. Don’t become uncircumcised. If you were called in uncircumcision, don’t be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. But what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.

And that’s simply an analogy and an illustration to say everybody remains in the condition in which he was called. So if you were saved single, that doesn’t change. If you were saved married, that doesn’t change. If you were saved and all of a sudden your unconverted spouse wants to divorce you, stay

the way you are...stay the way you are.

“Were you called while a slave?” verse 21. “Don’t worry about it. If you’re able to be free, do that. If there’s a path to freedom, take it. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freed man.” You’re free in Him anyway. “Likewise he who was called while free is Christ’s slave. You were bought with a price, don’t become slaves of men.” Don’t let anybody dictate what you ought to do. “Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.”

So how does that work out? You come, you receive the Lord Jesus Christ, you’re a converted husband, you have an unsaved wife. You’re a converted wife, you have an unsaved husband. What are you supposed to do? Withhold from him a physical relationship? Divorce him? Throw him out of the house? No, stay where you are...stay where you are.

You’re single and you come to Christ. Are you now supposed to be a monk the rest of your life? Are you supposed to be celibate the rest of your life? No. If you have that gift, fine. If you don’t, get married...get married.

Single or married, whatever God wills in whatever situation you’re in, stay that way. That is so important because Christianity was never intended to just rip and shred families. The very opposite is true. Unless that unbeliever wants to leave, you become the sanctifying influence for the one that stays.

So is our sexual relationships somehow unspiritual? No. Should those saved after their widowed...or divorced remarry? Yes, you have the freedom to remarry or stay single, whatever is God’s will for you.

What are the alternatives then for married people, to Christians? No divorce. And if you do leave, you don’t remarry anybody else and you come back to your husband. Those are your two options. If you’re married to a non-Christian and the non-Christian decides to divorce you...let it happen, you’re free to remarry.

Now there’s another question in Paul’s mind at this point and it has to do with virgins, verse 25. “Now concerning virgins,” these are the never married. We’ve dealt with the single and the married and the widowed and the formerly married, divorced, and now we get around to the virgins.

Now this is probably what was going on. Now get the big picture. They’ve got this sexually perverted culture, they want to distance themselves from the world and so they come to the conclusions that if they just distance themselves completely from physical relationships, this is going to be the spiritual high ground. Therefore there would be people who had never been married, men and women. Virgins would cover men and women who had never married. They had never known a man, to borrow the

biblical euphemism. What do they do? Do they just stay that way? *Parthenoi*, it is used in Revelation 14:4 one time to refer to men. That's why I say, it can be men or women, most often used to refer to women. These are people who had never had a relationship.

So, "I have no command of the Lord." The Lord didn't say anything...the Lord didn't say anything. "However, I will give you my judgment," literally, "as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy, or faithful." I will give you a faithful judgment as one who is trustworthy because he is inspired by the Lord. "I think this is good in view of the present distress that it is good for a man to remain as he is."

So, if you can be single, back to verse 1, verse 8, stay single. Hard times are coming. They were, by the way, seventeen years from the first general persecution under Domitian, the sixth emperor of Rome, and it was a massacre and a bloodletting of Christians.

So he's saying, "Look, if you're single and you've never been married, so you're not now married to a believer, or non-believer, you're not divorced, you're not widowed, you're in the category of never having been married, boy, that's a good place to be in. That's a good place because of the present distress...the challenges that are coming on us. It's going to be a tough world. A few years from now, some of you are going to...you're going to be killed. Diocletian's persecution stretched across the Roman world.

But, verse 28, we already read verse 26 and 27....verse 28, "If you marry, you haven't sinned and if a virgin marries, she hasn't sinned." Are you beginning to get the picture of what they were asking him? That singleness seems to be the right thing, no sexual relationship seems to be the right thing. And he's setting all that aside. Look, there's trouble in the world, singleness is great because you're not going to bring a family into the world and then watch your children being burned at the stake...your wife. There's something to be said for being single in a time of terrible, frightening persecution. But if you marry, you haven't sinned. And if a virgin marries, she hasn't sinned. "Yet such will have trouble in this life and I'm trying to spare you." You'll have *thlipsis*, the word for trouble, pressure. You'll be crushed. It literally means to be pressed. Because we understand that, don't we? The single person worries about his own life. The married person, all of a sudden he worries about his wife and he worries about his children, or she worries about her husband and her children.

And then he says in verse 29, "Look, it's a short time, life...it's a short time. For some of you it's a very short time because you're going to get caught in the persecution. "So from now on, those who have wives should be as though they had none. Those who weep as though they didn't weep, and those who rejoice as though they didn't rejoice, and those who buy as though they didn't possess, and those who use the world as though they didn't make full use of it, for the form of this world is passing away."

Marriage has no relation to the eternal, right? You remember when they said to Jesus, “Who’s wife shall she be in heaven?” And Jesus said, “In heaven there is neither marrying or giving in marriage.” This is...this is good advice, Paul says, the pressure of the system, the problems of the flesh, living in this life, and the passing of the world means that if you can concentrate on the eternal things, in dire times, you simplify your life. We’re all going to have to simplify. We’re all going to have to pull things in. We’re all going to have to live in these difficult, difficult times. But for single people, life is simpler and not nearly as threatening or painful.

In verse 32 he adds, “I want you to be free from concern and one who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife.” And that’s exactly what he ought to be concerned about, exactly. Married folks have divided preoccupations, divided responsibility. His interests are divided, verse 34, “The woman who is unmarried and the virgin, that’s the formerly married one who is now unmarried either by widowhood or divorce, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. One who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.” And that’s exactly what she ought to be concerned about. And the things of the world...this doesn’t mean sinful things, just means the issues of life. “But I say this for your benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.”

You know, Paul was living this as a single man who had once been married. And he understood the single focus of this. He advises these...these virgins in the same way that he advised the formerly married in this passage, and says, “Stay where you are. If you’re married, stay married. If you’re single and you can do it, stay single. And if you’re a virgin and you can deal with that, stay that way...stay that way.”

So bottom line here, up to this point, is that becoming a Christian does not of necessity mean that you have to make some dramatic alteration of your marital status. That’s not what the Lord requires.

Two more questions remain here. “Should fathers spare their daughters the difficulties of marriage and keep them virgins for life?” Oh boy, some really intentioned fathers were saying “Well, I don’t want you marrying some of these men in the world out there. I don’t want to have you deal with all of that, all the immorality that may have been a part of their lives in the past.” You can understand this. A father comes to Christ, the father’s in the church, he’s got young daughters coming up. There are other men in the church. There are the young men in the church, single men in the church but their lives before Christ have been very sinful lives. And so this Christian father says to his daughters that he’s raising in the things of Christ, I don’t want you to get married. I don’t want you to do that. I want you to be pure. I want you to be devoted to Christ. I want you to be focused on the life of the church. I’ll take care of you, as your father. I’ll care for your life, you can stay at home and you can spend your life in the service of the Lord. And honoring the Lord.

And so, apparently some of these fathers thought this was really a great idea. Paul needs to answer that. Verse 36, “If any man thinks he’s acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter if she’s past her youth and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes. He doesn’t sin, let her marry.”

You know what had happened? Some fathers were taking...making a promise, “I’m going to keep you a virgin. I’m going to protect you from this wicked sinful world. I’m going to protect you from these men. I’m not going to put you in a position to be married and deal with all the troubles of life. I’m going to take care of you.” And then the girl gets older, she comes into maturity and she’s past her childhood and she wants to get married. And he’s kind of stuck and he’s saying, “Well, what do I do?” He now thinks he’s acting unbecomingly toward his daughter. She doesn’t want this.

So Paul says, “Let her marry...let her marry. But, on the other hand, verse 37, he who stands firm in his heart being under no constraint but has authority over his own will and has decided this in his own heart to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well and he who doesn’t give her in marriage will do well if this pleases her. But if it gets to the point where this is now an action that is unbecoming to her, that is irritating to her that she doesn’t desire, that she doesn’t want, let her marry.” So if she wants to stay single, keep her, care for her, let her invest her life in the Kingdom, in the advance of the gospel. But if she wants to get married, let her marry.

God can lead through fathers. I have to believe that. But sometimes we may have plans that just really don’t make sense. Fathers in those days made contracts and probably some of these fathers had made some kind of covenant, you know, we have some of that going on today, you know. People making covenants of abstinence and things like that. That’s fine for single people. But it would be silly for a father to say this is a life covenant, cause you really don’t know till time passes and a daughter reaches some level of maturity, whether or not she can deal with being single or being married. In any case, a father who cares for a daughter and she stays home and focuses on the Lord and the Kingdom does well, if that’s her desire, a father who lets her marry does well, as well.

Well, there’s nothing left except two verses, should widows remarry...should widows remarry. And we can put divorce in here as well. “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives but if her husband’s dead, she’s free to be married to whom she wishes, with one provision...what is it?...only what?...only in the Lord. Only marry believers. Only in the Lord.

In my opinion, however, she’s happier if she remains as she is.”

That’s just an opinion. He says, “Look, I can just tell you, as a man who was married and a man who is single, it’s simpler. And I consider in saying this, I’m giving you the mind of the Holy Spirit.”

And I say this to you who are single, particularly, if you can remain single in the service of Christ, do so, but not to the jeopardy of your purity. If that's an issue, get married. And if that's an issue, don't postpone your marriage cause marriage postponed constitutes an illegitimate single life. If you don't have the gift of singleness, get married. It always makes me shudder a little bit when somebody says, "Yeah, we've decided to get married." Oh great, when are you getting married? "A year from March. Oh really, just exactly what might happen between now and then, do you have any idea?" I'm a believer in like you give a girl a ring and within sixty days you're married. Oh, you can't plan the wedding. Forget that, forget that, what do you mean plan the wedding. Look, I have a plan, I have a plan. We do the weddings here, we do them some time on the Lord's day in the afternoon, we just have all the people who want to get married, come up, you don't have to pay anything, everybody use the same flowers, we just have a big time. The church is here. You sing a lot of great songs, you have a great time.

You know, one pastor tried that. And at the end of the service...they do that in Russia, by the way, I've been to those services and I've been to the weddings that happen immediately after the Sunday-morning service, they're really wonderful. One pastor said, "I'm going to do that." He got up after a sermon and he said, "Will those then wishing to get married, please come forward." And it's a fact that three bachelors and 42 old maids came. So you have to...you have to put some limits on how that works. I mean, you've got to have your partner picked before the Sunday that you show up in the front, okay?

Well all of that to say, Paul gives us some great practical help here, doesn't he, in this chapter? Really wonderful choices here. Isn't that like our Lord who gives us such grace...such wonderful grace? For single people, don't delay. If God's designed you for marriage, get married. If you're divorced or widowed and you can stay single, stay single. If not, and you have grounds for remarriage, get married. If you're widowed and you can stay single, if not get married. If you're married to a believer, remain. If you're married to a non-believer and he wants to stay, or she wants to stay, remain and be a sanctifying blessing to the family. And if you're married to an unbeliever who wants out, let him go, you're not in bondage to that person.

Well, you say, "I'm so far down the line, I've already messed up all that." Well you'll be glad to know if we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, right? It's all about His forgiveness.

There must have been many such in Corinth who were seeking His forgiveness. Accept His grace and live from now on the way He commands us to live.

Father, it's been exciting the last three weeks to just dig in to this a little bit and have hopefully a better understanding of Your truth on this and we know that what You give us is for our good. It is so

that we can put ourselves in the place of maximum joy and maximum blessing and we all need forgiveness, Lord, for so many things in our lives. And there are folks who in this congregation tonight are feeling some of the pain of breaking Your law in the past, but You're a God of forgiveness and You cleanse us from all our sins according to the riches of Your grace that are provided for us endlessly and boundlessly in Christ. And all You ask of us is that we confess, that we repent, and that we start a pattern of obedience in our lives now. I pray, Lord, that Your grace would be upon all of us and that Your power would be on us to enable us to live as You would have us live, whether single or married, whatever You have for us, may we know that clearly, may we live joyfully in the midst of that. And would You provide for us what we so much need in order to be the people You want us to be. We thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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