

What you were not afraid to ask

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[0 : 00] Let's see if we can get the technology to work. Yes, so far so good. Right, there's a Woody Allen film called Everything You Were Afraid...

! You always wanted to know about sex but were afraid to ask. I think he actually stole the title from somewhere else as well. But in this case, actually, they had asked. Most people think that this first... There's a quote in the first verse, is a good for a man not to marry or not to have sexual relations. Is probably a quote from a letter that Paul had received. Now, before we dive into this, I'd just like to remind you of one doctrinal principle.

A principle that we call total depravity. As it applies particularly to marriage. So, in Genesis 2.18, the Lord had said, It's not good for a man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

And so, man and women were created to be together. And yet, after the fall, even that which is good and right in itself is tainted.

[1 : 09] And so, he says to the woman, just a chapter later, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing. With pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.

So, those things which were good and right become tainted. And that's... So, we sometimes use the term total depravity. Which doesn't mean that things are as bad as they could possibly be.

But it means that everything about human life is tainted by sin. So, 1 Corinthians 7. Chris said on Wednesday, you're about to dive into the minefield of 1 Corinthians 7.

Well, is it a minefield or is it a gold mine? Well, it certainly can be a minefield, I think. If you're unwary. If you tread unwarily. I mean, it seems to go against things that are said elsewhere in the scripture about marriage and so on.

It even... Did you notice it even seems to contradict itself? So, in verses 3 to 5, he says, The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband, and so on.

[2 : 25] He says, The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but to her husband, and husband belongs to the wife. And yet, in verse 29, he says, From now on, those who have wives should live as they had none.

So, not only does he seem to be saying different things to the rest of the other passages of scripture about marriage and other issues, he even seems to be contradicting himself here.

At least at first sight. We need to dig into this, and see what we can make of it, and see what he's really trying to tell us. And so, I'd like to actually, to give, because of this nature of this passage, to give a relatively long introduction.

And so, first of all, I'd like to just briefly say, how should we approach a passage like this? Secondly, put this passage in context, because I think the context is important here.

And then thirdly, we'll dig into some of the issues he says himself, to tackle the tricky issues. We'll look at one or two of the particular issues, but I say, you'll be glad to know I'm not going to go through verse by verse, or we'll be here till midnight.

[3 : 43] But I'd also, as part of that, like to look at the way he tackles some of these issues, because I think that's very useful in itself. So, if we have a passage like this, how are we going to deal with it?

Well, we could just ignore it, because we don't like it. I could have just gone on to chapter eight.

One of the advantages, or perhaps one of the disadvantages, of going through a book, chapter by chapter, is that you have to deal with the difficult bits.

Or, of course, we could just expound it in such a way that does violence to the rest of Scripture.

And, you know, ignore what else Scripture says on these subjects, and interpret it, and say, well, clearly it means that.

And that's when it really does become a minefield. You can really get yourself into trouble by doing things like that, by taking one verse from one passage out of context, and making it mean something that it's really not meant to.

Or, what's the proper way to do it? Well, of course, we should be interpreting, as we say, Scripture with Scripture. If something's difficult to understand, we look at another passage of Scripture to throw light on it.

[5 : 02] And we should meditate on it, and we should apply wisdom to it. And, that's what that psalm we were just singing says.

We need to reflect on it, apply our minds to it, meditate about it, try and understand it. So, I hope that's what we're going to do this evening, is the third of those, other two approaches.

Now, let me just remind you, he had started talking about sexual immorality and marriage in the end of chapter 6. Again, I don't want to go back and do the whole sermon again, of course.

But, one, just to note, a few things we picked out last week, is that marriage itself is good, but it doesn't survive death. Death, and, let me just, right, yeah, marriage is good, because it doesn't survive death.

It completes the image of God, as male and female. Remember, it says that in Genesis 1, in the image of God, man, God created man in his image, male and female, he created them.

[6 : 11] And yet, at the same time, it's not ultimate, it doesn't survive death, as we read in this passage, and it says elsewhere. And Jesus said, in the resurrection, we're like the angels, which presumably means that, we're not married, this was the issue the Sadducees raised, of course, if somebody's married, a woman is married to two men, or seven men, actually, in this life, whose wife will she be in the resurrection?

And Jesus said, you don't understand, we're not given in, people are not given in marriage, in the resurrection, they're like the angels. So, marriage is not, ultimate, in that sense.

Jesus was not married, of course, conspiracy theory, and fancy books, to the contrary. I mean, if Jesus was married, to Mary Magdalene, why would the church, have bothered to hide it?

Most Jews were married, after all. And, I think even more telling, on the cross, Jesus, took care of his mother, didn't he? He said, to his mother, look, here's, here's your, your son, John, and gave her into the care, of the apostle John.

Surely, if he's been married, he would have done the same, for his wife, if he didn't. So, we can be fairly sure, that Jesus wasn't married, I think. And, perhaps, for fairly obvious reasons, that it wouldn't have been fair, to the woman, to put her through, what Jesus was going, to go through.

[7 : 40] And, we're fairly certain, that Paul wasn't married, he seems to, say that in this passage, in 1 Corinthians 7. Some people have suggested, that, Philippians 4, where it talks about, a loyal yoke fellow, might have been a wife, left behind in Philippi, but, doesn't seem very plausible.

And even if it was, it's clear that, if it was the case, they had agreed, to live a part, and, if it was, celibate, lies. So, unless, Paul is an almighty hypocrite, he is, living a, a celibate life.

And so, Paul wasn't married. So, not everybody, it's not compulsory, for Christians, to be married. Now, what about the context, of this?

That, the period of Jesus's life, actually, was, a bit of a window, of relative peace, in Judea. Herod the Great, by dint of a lot of, violence, and a, considerable amount, of political astuteness, had, um, managed to, take, seize control, under, with Roman support, of most of, Jerusalem, and Judea, and Israel, well, in fact, most of Israel.

Um, and he had, knocked down, um, uh, Zerubbabel's temple, and actually rebuilt it, or started rebuilding it, it wasn't completed, till after his death, and this was the, temple indeed, that Jesus and the disciples, were talking about, it was on a, grand scale, similar to, Solomon's.

[9 : 19] Um, his, immediate descendants, had not, managed to hang on, to all of, uh, Judea, because we know that, um, Pilate was the governor, in the southern, part of, of Israel, but, Herod's, I think it was actually, his grandson, his son or grandson, but it, uh, was still, held on to the northern part, but both, of course, they were Roman puppets, in a sense, but, they had a considerable amount of power, Herod, particularly, um, was a king, and had a certain amount of, political power, up in the north.

Um, but, things were beginning to, unravel. Um, it's thought, that 1 Corinthians, is written, at least, when I say it's thought, this is according to the lion, handbook from the Bible, so I suppose it must be true, um, suggests that 1 Corinthians, uh, was written about, in AD 54, and AD 54, was a rather

significant date, in itself.

It was, um, the date in which, Claudius, who by Roman standards, was a fairly good, and a fairly sane, emperor, died, and he was succeeded, by Nero, unstable, tyrannical, and, um, an exponent, of that great, uh, tactic of, if you get in political trouble, then, persecute, and, uh, a despised minority, um, often the Christians, in Nero's case, that's a, tactic, tactic that's, stood the test of time, and has been used by, tyrants, for thousands of years, and, Nero was good on that, good at that, um, and in Jerusalem also, things were beginning to unravel, when the, um, the fact that Sanhedrin, had said that, you know, we don't want to upset the Romans, and they'll come and, take our place away, there actually, was some justification, for this, um, and certainly, by, AD 55, things were starting to unravel, the, um, there were revolutionary movements, and warlords, and, in fact, it all, just got worse and worse, until, in AD 70, that, Jerusalem and Judea, had become virtually ungovernable, um, and really, the Romans had no choice, but, to intervene, and, um, the, it was all recorded, by the Jewish historian, Josephus, who, actually was with the invading, Roman army, um, he was, although he was Jewish, he was, pro-Roman, and, it, apparently, it was just complete chaos, in the city, um, but, the Christians, who were still in the city, in, in the temple, remembered, Jesus' prophecy, about when they see, the abomination, of desolation, talked about, in the, prophecy, prophet Daniel, and, they fled the city, and they escaped, and so, um, that prophecy, that Jesus had, said, that, you know, when you see it, don't go back for your coat, get out fast, that's exactly, what they'd done, and, um, that happened, in AD 70, not, shortly, well, not shortly, but just a few years, after this, um, passage was written, and, and things were beginning, to unravel, even by AD 54, and, the internal context, of course, as we've already seen, is that, it was a, disunited church, uh, with all sorts, of tricky questions, all sorts, of problems, problems, and so, in AD 70, came, perhaps not the final judgment, uh,

Jesus said, remember, this is just the beginning, of birth pains, but certainly, a final judgment, a final judgment, on the, temple system, and the city of Jerusalem, never again, would there be a temple, and sacrifices, on Temple Mount, in Jerusalem, and, just to make sure of it, the Muslims, had built a mosque there, um, so it was a judgment, on that system, that, though they'd been instituted, by God, had failed, to keep the people, meeting with God, no longer would, there be a holy of holies, in Jerusalem, where, you could, go and meet with God, as it were, face to face, so it was a final judgment, and it's in that context, that I think, of political unrest, in the, Roman Empire, of, um, disputes, and chaos, within the Corinthian church, which existed, of course, in a seaport, with all the, natural chaos, that you get in any seaport, and, um, say, things are already beginning, to unravel, in Jerusalem, that,

[14 : 25] I think that, Paul wrote this book, and particularly, this chapter, and I think we need to, um, sort of, bear that in mind, as we come to it, Christians will always live, I think, in a sort of, dynamic tension, between the affairs, of this world, and the affairs, of the next world, um, remember what Jesus said, again, Matthew 6, I'll just read it out, save a bit of time, do not worry, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear, for the pagans, run all, after all these things, and your heavenly father, knows that you need them, but seek first, his kingdom, and righteousness, and all these things, will be given to you, as well, therefore, do not worry, about tomorrow, for tomorrow, will worry, about itself, each day, has trouble enough, of its own, and so, it's not surprising, that in this chapter, Paul puts emphasis, on the need first, to seek, the kingdom, and I think, that's what he's getting at, here, so let's look, at some of these, issues, um,

I'm not, I mean, he deals, as you, as you would have seen, with all sorts of things, he deals with, slavery, and freedom, and, um, possessions, and things like that, but he focuses, on sexual relations, and marriage, as you, would have realised, as we read it, and his approach, is very much the same, anyway, so, what I'd like to do, is look, first of all, at what he says, about sexual relations, in, particularly sexual relations, in marriage, and then, rather than going on, to look at the other issues, that he deals with, see the approach, that he takes, to dealing, with these issues, and see what we can learn, from that, because we may not face, exactly the same issues, as the Corinthians, but we will certainly face, problems of a similar, magnitude, and difficulty, and see how he goes about, dealing with these issues, okay, and so I'm going to spend, perhaps most of these, there's four, topics, but I'll, try and get through the first, three fairly quickly, and spend most time, on the, on the last one, so first of all, he says that, we shouldn't be denying, our humanity, we have to be realistic, as it says in that passage, we have needs, our father knows, that we need food, and clothing, and housing, and in fact, most of us, need, sexual relations as well, as Paul points out

here, he says, some of us can live, celibate lives, but most people can't, and so for instance, in verse nine, he says, if unmarried and widows, cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry, than to burn, with passion, actually, it's perhaps, interesting, that, Paul, gives more advice, to women, to remain unmarried, than he does to men, and you've noticed, that in the passage, maybe he feels, that women have more, find it easier, to remain celibate, than men do, I don't know, but, anyway, his advice is really, the same, to both men, and women, that if you cannot live, a celibate life, then, you should marry, because the alternative, is immorality, we shouldn't deny, fanatically deny, our human needs, and if, because if we do, we do a lot more harm, than good, I mean, how much, trouble, and distress, and evil, has been caused, by this, Catholic insurance, on the insistence, on their, priests remaining celibate, most of them, can't do it, as Paul says, well, about most, that may be unfair, but certainly, many of them, can't do it, and certainly, I don't think it's right, that we should insist, that preachers of the gospel, should do so, most of the apostles, were married of course, as we, very well know, yeah, it's a, some people, may have the gift, of being able, to remain celibate, and it might be, an advantage to them, but most people don't, and we all have, other needs anyway, don't we, we all need food, we can fast sometimes, but we all need food, and, we all need shelter, and we need, other things as well, we're humans, we're creatures, and, we're not supposed to be, some sort of, fanatic, rather we're supposed to live, as giving thanks, for the, things that the father, knows that we need, and gives us, so, we shouldn't deny, our, humanity, is the first thing, I think he's saying here, and, another interesting point, I think we can get out of this, which is well worth saying,

I think, is that, sex should not be used, to manipulation, all our human deeds, all our human needs, I mean, do leave us open, don't they, to manipulation, but sexual needs, particularly perhaps, and both men, and women, can do this, men can do it, by forcing their partner, by, dominating them, and, you know, just, sort of, trying to overpower them, and women, can do it, by denying, their partners, sex, sexual relations, so that, until they get their own way, and, it's a temptation, for all of us, to do that sort of thing, isn't it, to use sex, as a manipulation, sexual relations, among humans, bear very little, relation, despite of what, Stephen Fry says, to sexual relations, among animals, of course, they are, some, sexual relations, are partly, for reproduction, and so on, and, animals have their displays, and so on, but, so that they, can pick your best mate, but, the actual, sexual relationships, between humans, are far deeper, and more complex, than, any, interactions, between humans, between animals,

[20 : 49] I mean, they're, they're far, in one hand, they're far more, cerebral, I mean, we, we, put our, involve our minds, in giving sexual pleasure, to each other, and, and maybe, even, on the other end, they're also, perhaps, they're more ecstatic, than even, we find, among, animals, and, sexual relations, between humans, are very complex, and, it does, enable us, I say, to exploit one another, if we're not, very careful, and, it's, interesting, Paul's, solution, to this particular issue, he proposes, joint ownership, did you notice that, the more enlightened, countries, have perhaps, joint ownership, of property, among married couples, but, no, many of them, don't even say that, but, what Paul, actually proposes, is joint ownership, of the bodies, in verse, um, sit four, and five, you know, in these feminist days, of a woman's body, as her own, he says, well no,

I'm afraid, that's not true, if you're married, what did you say, in the marriage service, with my body, I honour you, all that I have, I give you, and, but it's not, a one way traffic, he says, it's not that, the woman's body, becomes the property, of the man, no, this is entirely, reciprocal, um, the, uh, it's, it's like having, a joint bank account, there's a joint body, account as well, and, um, and so, we should not be, using our bodies, to exploit one another, but rather, we should be making, uh, um, encouraging one another, and making, as it said, making ourselves, more complete, through our sexual, relationships, with one another, and so, we shouldn't be, denying each other, for any reason, other than, by mutual consent, just as, if you have a joint bank account, joint property, you wouldn't sell your house, without asking your husband, or wife, um, it would be mutual, and so, the same, we shouldn't, give up sexual relations, except, possibly, by mutual consent, and even then, he says, only do it, for a short time, because otherwise, there'll be too much, temptation, to immorality, and you might start, looking elsewhere, that's an important, point in itself, of course, that, we don't actually, encourage our partners, to start looking elsewhere, by, um, you know, by being cold, or by being, uh, unresponsive, so, sex shouldn't be used, for manipulation, now, that's all I'm actually, going to say, about these, issues of, um, sexual desire, as such, there's quite a lot, about it, but I want to, sort of, look more generally, at what Paul's saying, in this passage, now, um,

and the Paul point, is making here,

I think, is that, these, um, even legitimate desires, can, anchor us, to this world, I think that's what he's, um, the point Paul's, making here, and that's why, in verses 32, um, sorry, well, I've got the numbers wrong there, so it's, it's, um, 32 to 30, yeah, well, sorry, it is, it's, it's, it's, he starts that saying that, in verse, um, 29, now on those who have wives, should live as if they had none, those who mourn as if they did not, those who are happy as if they were not, those who buy something as if it were not those to keep, those who use the things of the world, as if it, not engrossed in them, for this world in its present form, is passing away, I would like you to be free from concern, an unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs, how he can please the Lord, but a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world, how he can please his wife, and his interests are divided, and, um, he goes on like that,

I think he's not saying that it is wrong that, um, a married man should be concerned with the affairs of his wife, to please his wife, that's what he should be doing, of course, husbands love your wives, he says elsewhere in Ephesians, um, but it is anchoring us, to this world, and, um, it's what Jesus said, wasn't it, that, um, you've got to love me more than your wife, or husband, or son, or daughter, seek first, the kingdom of God, and then these things will be added to you, and I think this is what Paul's saying here, when he's, almost seems to contradict himself, saying if you have a wife, live as if you don't have a wife, um, um, I don't think he's, he's saying, well, he's clearly not saying, don't involve in sexual relations, don't care for your wife, because he just told them earlier not to do that, I think what he's saying is, don't make this your anchor, don't be so anchored in the world, that you can't give it up, um, we all have a desire,

I guess, don't we, to retire, to whatever our, view of heaven is, whether it's a, a place, down by the Mediterranean, or an Alpine Chalet, or, maybe a windmill in Norfolk, or whatever our, particular view is, most of us don't do that, in fact, the only couple I know, who probably will do that, are the couple, a couple who have no children, my sister, has bought a, a place in Spain, but now she wants to sell it, because, her grandchildren are all in England, or in Australia, grandchildren, we don't do it, because of grandchildren, we want to see them go up, don't we, quite right, that we should, those things do anchor us, to this world, and, they're fair enough, as far as they go, but, they mustn't be, the ultimate anchor, they mustn't hold this world, so firmly, that we can't leave it, that we can't give them up.

[27 : 22] Now, I say, I'd like to spend, perhaps a little bit, more time, more time, I don't want to go on, for too long, we want communion today, but I'd like to spend, a little bit more time, looking at this, the approach, that Paul takes here, to dealing with, some of these, issues, and the first point, I'd like to make, is that wisdom, reads the signs, of the times, times, of trouble, and crisis, might alter, the balance, of wise behaviour, and I think, this is what he's, saying, in verses 26, and 28, because of the, present crisis, I think it's good, for you to remain, as you are, if you do, marry, you will, have not sinned, and a virgin, married, she's not sinned, but those who marry, will face many troubles, in this life, and I want to spare you this, what is wise, to do in one, circumstance, might be different, to do, difficult, to do in another, circumstance, circumstance, and as Jesus said, to be saddled, with a baby, or to be pregnant, or with a saddle, with a partner, when the destruction comes, is, bad news, but that's not saying, that it's always, the wrong decision, but it, we have to read, the signs of the times, and see what is, actually happening, but we are, opening ourselves up, of course, to, trouble, and distress, by committing ourselves, to things, and people, in this world, we are certainly, opening ourselves, as, it's what, it's what, they tell you, if you listen to, sort of a, various counsellors, bereavement counsellors, and so on, they tell you things like, grief, is the price, we pay for loving, and, that sounds a bit, of a cliché, but actually, it's true, isn't it, if we love people, then, if we lose them, we find, there's not grief involved, and so he says, those who mourn, shouldn't, be as if they don't mourn, but equally, those, who, are happy, as if they realise, that they're, to remember their happiness, is transient, and if you bought, the latest gadget, the latest TV, or whatever it is, remember, that you could lose it, don't build your life, around it, you might have to give it up, and, there's a lot, here, actually,

Paul says, about wisdom, and guidance, I think, and, there is a, a sort of guidance, one theory, a Christian guidance, that says, God has a wonderful plan, for your life, well, of course, you can't argue, with the principle, in a sense, that is true, Paul says that, in Romans 8, doesn't he, that, those whom he, predestined, he also, I can't remember it all, those whom he, foreknew he predestined, those whom he predestined, he justified, those whom he justified, he also glorified, he

says, nobody can separate us, from the love of God, so the statement, is true enough, God does have a wonderful plan, for your life, but, the wonder, is not always, immediate, and, moreover, often, when we start, thinking like this, God has a wonderful plan, for your life, you sort of expect, some sort of divine revelation, some sort of neon sign, in the sky, as to what this, is going to be, and then you put it, straight into practice, without it passing, through your mind, at all, and then you give up, thinking altogether, or, of course, you might, miss it, suppose you missed, you know, suppose you blinked, while the neon sign, was there, and you missed it, and then, oh dear, for the rest of your life, you're on the wrong track, it's not, doesn't work like that, and yet, so often, you do hear, Christians talking like that, but that's not the way it works, and that's certainly not, the way, Paul deals with this, yes, I've written down here, paradoxically, this, actually, most often occurs, among, Christians, most influenced, by postmodern thinking, because it reflects, the thinking of the world, have you, you notice this, you start, by saying, there are no absolutes, but of course, you've got to have, some sort of moral code, because society, can't exist without it, so what do you land up with, you land up with, political correctness, and how does this work, well it says, well I'm more liberal, and more postmodern, than you, so what I say, must be right, and if you disagree with me, you're a bigot, have you noticed, how fashionable, the word bigot is nowadays, a bigot is anybody, who disagrees with you, or possibly disagrees, with the BBC, yeah, fashionable word nowadays, there's no room, for argument, because there is no, justification, there's no, there is no valid argument, it's holier than thou, in the end, isn't it,

I'm more liberal, more postmodern, than you are, so what I say goes, and that's it, that's the way it is, you're a bigot, and we find this, unfortunately, we find this, sort of thinking, in the, infecting the church also, don't we, except then, it's dressed up, in spiritual language, they say, the Lord has shown me, that you've got to go out, and I don't know, marry this girl, and hang on, hang on, I'm not sure, I want to marry this girl, no, the Lord has shown me, that you're, blaspheming against, the Holy Spirit, you're opposing, the Holy Spirit, and clearly, this sort of thing, was rampant, in the Corinthian church, spiritual, one-upmanship, and, postmodern thinking, thinking that denies, any rational argument, but, that's not, the way it works, and that's not, the way Paul works, Paul is a great believer, in reasoned argument, a great believer, in measured, being sparing, with the absolute, and I'd just like, to look through here, this passage, and look, just look at the language, that Paul uses, of course, there are, some things, that are absolute, and so in verse 10, he says, to the married,

I give this command, not I, but the Lord, a wife must not separate, from her husband, and so he's saying, well, yeah, that's, I think that's what he means, when he says, not I, but the Lord, he's saying, this is an absolute, command, an absolute truth, in one sense, that a married, a woman should not, separate from her husband, there's no room, for argument there, but even this, absolute principle, he notices, has to be applied, with judgment, and so in verse 12, he says, to the rest, I say this, I not the Lord, if any brother, or wife, who is not a believer, and she's willing, to live with him, he must not divorce her, so yeah, okay, it applies, even if your partner, is not a believer, but that may not, be workable, and notice there, he says, I not the Lord, in other words, he's an apostle, he has authority, but what I think, he's saying there, is this not an absolute, command, this is good advice, but it's not an, absolute command, and to show, that it's not an, absolute command, it says, he says in verse 15, if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so, a believing man, or woman, is not bound, in such circumstances,

[35 : 25] God has called us, to live, in peace, so, even when there is an absolute, it has to be applied, with judgment, and wisdom, but in many cases, of course, these things are not, absolutes at all, all the way, through this passage, we can notice, the measured language, that Paul uses, so, in verse 5, for instance, he says, he talks about, doing something, for mutual consent, and for a time, in other words, you've got to discuss it, think about it, is this a good idea, you know, can we, can we, give up sex, for a week, is it a good idea, think about it, whether we can really do that, without falling into sin, and if we do, let's make sure, we know how long, it's going on for, don't want you saying, you know, it's Thursday, we said we were going to have sex, on Thursday, but, you know, well,

I thought it was Friday, you know, think about it, get it right, think, plan, plan ahead, in verse 6, he says, this is a concession, not a command, I'm not telling you, you must do this, but, it looks like a good idea, I think maybe, you know, we've got to live in the real world, and living in the real world, this is the way, to do it, it's a concession, and in verse 7, I mean, verse 7, really Paul, I wish, that all

men were like me, what sort of language is that, for an apostle, the King translation, is not one I've, come across recently, he says, I would like all men, to be like me, come on Paul, that's not very positive, is it, but he says, that's what he says, and that's I think, what it means, you know, it would be kind of nice, if everybody was like me, and could live a celibate life, but of course, they can't, and I'm not going to, claim that they should,

I wish, verses 8 and 9, he says, well, something's good, it's good for them, to stay unmarried, as I am, but there's a but, alternative, sometimes, maybe, the alternative is better, if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it's better to marry, than to burn with passion, so, one thing can be good, perhaps, but the other thing, could be good as well, the other thing, could be better, later on, he says much the same thing, the other way around, it's good to marry, but it might be better, to remain unmarried, verse 17, he talks about a rule, this is the rule, I lay down in the church, everyone should, retain the place in life, the Lord has assigned to him, and which God is called to him, this is the rule, I lay down in all the churches, but it's not, really a rule is it, in fact, it's much more of a guideline, because even, in this passage, he says later on, if you get the chance, if you're a slave, but you get a chance, to gain your freedom, then take it, and,

Paul didn't always keep, that rule himself, you know, there's stuff about circumcision, he says, if you're uncircumcised, don't become circumcised, but Paul broke, that rule himself once, because we read in, I think it's in Acts 21, no, sorry, it's not in Acts 21, it's, never mind, oh yeah, Acts 16, Paul says, he took Timothy, whose father was a Greek, and had him circumcised, so that he wouldn't be, barred from, coming to the synagogue, and teaching, and speaking to Jews, so, Paul broke his own guideline there, because, it was better in that case, more wise in that case, to, have Timothy circumcised, it was just going to avoid, a whole lot of trouble, which would not have, which he could avoid, so why not, and in verse 35, he says, look, what I'm dealing with here,

I don't want to restrict you, I'm not trying to, you know, cut down your freedom, I'm not, you should make these decisions, for yourself guys, but, I'm, I'm going to suggest some things, for your own good, I'm going to give you some advice, but he says, it's for your own good, I'm not trying to restrict you, or command you, or, enforce anything here, and in particular, well, no, let's not say in particular, verse 38, so that's the reverse, of what he'd said, in verse 8 and 9, verse 38, he said, it's good to remain unmarried, but it might be better, to be married, in verse 38, he says, it's right, to get married, but it might be better, to stay unmarried, in verse 39, that's how it is, 37, he says, the man who has settled the matter, in his own mind, notice what he says there, first of all, you need to settle the matter, and where do you do this settling, do you, sort of, put down a fleece, like Gideon did, do you, expect the elders, to come and tell you the right answer, do you, do you even look for a proof text, in the scripture, no, he says, you settle it, in your own mind, work it out for yourself guys, think, and then now, let's look, close, most closely, at verse 40, and this verse 40,

[41 : 31] I think is the most striking of all, see what he's saying here, in verse 39, he says, a woman is bound to a husband, as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she's free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord, in my judgment, she's happier, if she stays as she is, and I think that I too, have the spirit of God, first of all, he says, in my judgment, or, it's obviously the weak sense of judgment here, some translations say, in my opinion, that's clearly what he's saying, isn't it, he says, well, there's a case to be made, for the other side, my opinion is that she might, you know, this is my opinion on the subject, and, and, why, does he have this, why does he make this judgment, is it because, it's the spiritual thing to do, is it because it's the right thing to do, he doesn't actually say that, he says, well, actually, I think she's going to be happier, if she does this, does it this way, it's not that one is spiritual, and the other worldly, it's not that one is right, and the other is wrong, simply a case, in the current circumstances, given the chaos, that's around us at the moment, and the, possibilities of, you know, being torn in two directions,

I think she's going to be happier, if she remains unmarried, okay, but, you know, you can put a case both ways, certainly, is what he's saying, and, the criterion is simple, what's going to make her happy, keep her more happy, that's all he says, and, what is the basis, for this mighty apostle, giving this judgment, why does he say it, well, he says, I think, that I also, have the spirit of God, now, people do argue, about exactly what this means, it could mean, that he thinks, the spirit of God, agrees with him, but he's not certain, but, that doesn't sound very likely, more likely, he's saying something like, he feels that he is qualified, to make spiritual judgments, because, he has the spirit, but notice he says also, it may be that, some people in the,

Corinthian church, were saying, my spiritual judgment, given me by the Holy Spirit, is that a man, should abstain from, sexual relations, with his wife, which is the quote, that passage started with, maybe somebody, was saying that, so this is, what the Holy Spirit, has told me, and he says, well, okay, there's a, massive discussion there, but I also have the Holy Spirit, and that's the authority, he gives for it as well, he doesn't stand actually, on his apostolic authority here, he says, well, it's a matter of, spiritual judgment, of spiritual wisdom, think it out for yourself guys, we all have to make, decisions, the more important the decision, the more care, we should give to it, but that doesn't mean, we should, you know, say, well we can't make the decision, we'll just expect, God to, push the answer, into our minds somehow, that's a very dangerous way, of doing things, sometimes, God does do it, but even then, we should be very careful, think very carefully, about, you know, whether this is really, the Spirit of God, or we're just deceiving ourselves, the more important the decision, the more care it requires, the way of the Spirit, is to speak, spiritual wisdom, it's not based, on the principles, of this world, if you like, it's not based, on the principle, of a woman's body, as her own, if that's, one of the principles, of this world, it's based, on the principle, that we promise, our bodies to each other, when we get married, that's a spiritual principle, it's based, on the values, of the kingdom, and the principles, of the kingdom, and the way, the kingdom runs, and as we, sang in that psalm, Psalm 119, how can the, young remain pure, or how can the rest, of us remain pure, by meditating, thinking, studying God's word, thinking about it, saying what does it, really mean here, not finding a, proof text, that supports, my opinion, we can all do that, fairly easily, on most things, but actually, trying to find out, what the scripture says, and, you know, sometimes, there can be, you could come to, one of two decisions, and there's several things, that Paul says here, you could very well, come to one of two decisions, over, and they'd both, in a sense, be right, it would be right, to marry, or it would be right, not to marry, it would be, right to marry, if, you know, the, the woman is in danger, of becoming, an old maid, is on the shelf, as it were, and people are starting, to look at her, and make remarks, but it would also, be right, not to marry, if they can remain celibate, and devote their time, totally to the Lord, you could come, to different conclusions, with that same, spiritual wisdom, and those same, spiritual principles, what's the guy, the parliament guy, Dave, used to run, the parliament thing, Landon, yeah, he spoke here once, and said, you know, he believes that, Christian MPs, can go into, the different lobbies, and yet still, be, being faithful, to the spirit of God, and I think he's right, there are some, issues in which, you know, it's right to make up, your own mind, but we need to do it, on spiritual principles, we need to weigh up, the pros and cons, and as I said, at the beginning, the pros and cons, may well, depend on your, particular circumstances, you're in, he says, in view of the present, crisis, you've got to, think in this particular way, but, you might, may not always be, in that situation, and sometimes, he suggests in verse 20, the best decision, is just to live, with what you've got, I mean, you know, if you, it's a bit foolish, to buy a property, on a flood plain, but if you happen, to own one, then, surely, the best thing, is to, find out about, flood defences, not to, sort of, bemoan, sit there, bemoaning the fact, that you've, you know, you're about to get your feet wet, what can I do about this, and sometimes, you have to live, with what you've got, and stick where you are, otherwise, you can always be thinking, oh, the grass is green, on the other side, of the hill, you know, you can always be thinking that, stick where you are, and see what God, wants you to do, in that circumstance, is often, the best advice, but say, even then, not always, if you have the chance, to get your freedom, then take it, it's just to the slaves, you need sober, and spiritual judgment, as to what's best to do, in particular circumstances, you find yourself, weighing all the issues, carefully, well,

[48 : 58] I'm not an apostle, but I'd like to, like to, add a final thought, of my own to this, if I may, Paul doesn't actually, say this, but I think it's in the back, of his mind, God has created us, actually, with several abilities, that he doesn't have himself, I don't really often, notice that, there's several of them, actually, he says, that he cannot deny himself, for instance, he cannot be faithless, although we can, but one of those, is that, he's created us, with the ability, to make mistakes, but God can't make mistakes, because his wisdom, is so thorough, that he always makes, the right decision, and therefore, creating us, with the ability, to make mistakes, was not a mistake, on God's part, he actually, in a sense, wants us, to be, thinking things through, and occasionally, probably we will, make a mistake, you know the old saying, a man who's never made a mistake, has never made anything, there's a, truth in that saying, but there is a principle, of course, that we have to, keep in mind, we're not, on our own, as it were, we are, supposed to, judge with, spiritual wisdom, not the wisdom, of this world, and what he says, was, love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength, strength, talking about the word,

strength earlier, and it's perhaps, not entirely clear, what strength means there, but it certainly, seems to mean something, like if you're going to, pick up a really heavy boulder, you have to put your whole, self into it, don't you, and so, you have to put your whole, self into this, and you have to do your whole, with your whole mind, and with your whole heart, in other words, all of you, and with your whole soul, the deepest part of you, all of you, from the inside out, as to love the Lord, our God, with all, all these things, and then perhaps, we can be sure, that we're doing, what God requires, and if we do make a mistake, he will be gracious, and bring us back, so, let's sing, I'm going to sing a hymn, conclude with a hymn, about guidance, and it says, all the way, my saviour leads me, 869, but I don't think, that contradicts, what we've just been saying, I think exactly the reverse, it says that, our saviour, shows us, as we study his word, and as we think on it, and as we engage, ourselves with it, then he leads us, forward and onward, so, 869, all the way, my saviour leads me, See you next time.