

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 April 2019

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 0 0] Again, the scripture text is 1 Corinthians 7, 25-40, on page 1057 of the White Bibles. Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who would by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is.

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned. And if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned.

Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none.

And those who mourn as though they were not mourning. And those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing. And those who buy as though they had no goods. And those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.

[1 : 1 7] For the present form of this world is passing away. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord.

How to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things. How to please his wife. And his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord.

How to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things. How to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit.

Not to lay any restraint upon you. But to promote good order. And to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed.

If his passions are strong and it has to be. Let him do as he wishes. Let them marry. It is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart.

[2 : 1 4] Being under no necessity. But having his desire under control. And has determined this in his heart. To keep her as his betrothed. He will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well.

And he who refrains from marriage. Will do even better. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies. She is free to be married to whom she wishes.

Only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment. She is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the spirit of God. This is the word of the Lord.

You may be seated. Thank you. Well it's great to be with you today.

And I just want to mention that. After the message. And in the midst of our final singing. We're going to take a second offering today. And it won't go to the material needs of the church.

- [3 : 14] It will go to the particular needs of individuals. In the family of Holy Trinity. Who are experiencing. A season of financial duress. So I just want to advance your mind.
- After the sermon. To the care of the body. And the family together. Let me pray before we get underway. Our Heavenly Father. I do now pray.
- That you would forgive me of my sins. For they are many. And especially the words of my mouth. The meditation of my heart. Lord I pray that you would hide me behind your cross.
- And that we would see Jesus today. And the influence of Jesus. Upon all of our relationships. And I pray that he would be praised.
- As we consider this text. We come now. Having heard your word read. To its consideration for our lives. In Jesus name. Amen.
- [4 : 14] Amen. Well normally if you. Attend here regularly. You're fairly. Aware. Of my preaching rhythm.
- Which. Is to launch straight away. Into a single idea. That serves. The message. Today I break from that pattern.
- For just a few moments. To make three. Simple. Brief. Preliminary. Remarks. Before. The sermon itself.
- Remark. Number one. On the series. The series. This is the final message. If you haven't been coming along for very long. Final message.
- In a series of 15. Under the umbrella. Or theme. Of wise living. That's where we started the year. Not knowing what the year comes.
- [5 : 15] What are the various facets in which we will need wisdom. We looked at suffering. From the book of Job. The role of song.
- From psalms. Wisdom as it relates to our circumstances. From Proverbs. Our pursuits. Ecclesiastes.
- And then three now. From the topic of human sexuality. And the care of our own bodies. In relationship to one another.
- In other words. We've been now. Since the very beginning of January. Considering. What if this year involves sickness. Brought on to you by life. What wisdom will you need?
- What is the role of singing? As we make our way through life. And its various manifestations. What if certain circumstances come before you in life.
- [6 : 15] That need wisdom that you've never considered before. We are all chasing pursuits. Desires for life. What do we really need to remember.
- As we do that. And now. What is the guidance God would have for us. On human sexuality. On marriage.
- On the handling of our bodies. So much for a word on the series. What about number two. Preliminary remark. The selection of this text. If you have been coming along.
- The text surprised you this morning. Because you are anticipating a final message. From wisdom literature. A third message from the song of songs.
- Why choose this text? Simply put. Because the song of songs. Which exalts and celebrates marital love. Does not in itself represent the fullness of the Bible's teaching.
- [7 : 19] On marriage. Or sex. Or human sexuality. Or human sexuality. It's not that the song of songs. Presents anything that is inaccurate.
- It's just incomplete. And this text. Begins to show us. A pattern that God has established. Not merely.

In the garden. But for many. Who will remain unmarried. Either by choice. Or by circumstance. And the last thing.

I wanted anyone to think. As we look at this whole issue. In the coming year. Is that some people in the church. Are left on the outside. Looking in. To the fullness of God's purposes.

So much for a word on the series and selection. Finally. On the substance. Of this text. Something emerges in this text today. That's very surprising. The aspiration for you in life.

[8 : 18] Is not that you would simply get married. Here it is. But you would remain. In the condition in which you presently are.

The biblical teaching on marriage in its fullness. Isn't this pursuit of marriage. But this contentedness in remaining. In the present distress.

You'll see the word there in verse 26. In the present distress. It is good for a person to remain. As he is. Or. On the back side of the text.

Verse 40. Yet in my judgment. She is happier. If she remains. As she is. Or the prior literary context. Verse 8.

Of 1 Corinthians 7. To the unmarried. And to the widows. I say that it is good for them. To remain. Single. As I am. This is surprising.

[9 : 19] Because. Christianity. For all of its. Revolutionary. Ideas. Lays down this. Incredibly. Ordinary.

Implication. That when you come to Jesus. Remaining. Is the aspiration.

Is the aspiration. Of the Christian. I hope that's an encouragement. To many. In a day in which. I'm not going to riff on this long.

American. Protestant. Christianities. Post. World War II. Adherence. To. Adherence.

As it were. To. The. Life of. Marriage. And it's. Suburban. Ideals. Of a.

[10 : 18] Picket fence. And to the establishment. Of the home. And the marriage. And the children. As. Over time. Almost synonymous.

With the familial values. Of a Christian message. And this is. This is led to a. To a weightedness. That needs.

Correction. Interestingly. It was about 30 years ago. That a church. Hired me. For my first job. Under. At that time. The revolutionary.

Idea. That a minister. Would have. As part of their job. Description. A ministry. To singles. So.

This. This surprise. In the text. Is an encouragement. For us. To bring. Proper. Weightedness. To the bible's teaching. On marriage.

[11 : 14] Your aspiration. Is not marriage. But remaining. And what does that. Look like. Interestingly. Then the substance. Of first corinthians 7. Challenges.

The assumptions. Almost on the flip side here. That you know what. If you go ahead. And get married. Well. You didn't sin.

In doing so. I mean. That. That is so counter. To the situation. In which we live. But it's the repeated. Refrain. Of the text. Marriage.

By the way. Isn't sinful. All. Whereas. We have created. Marriage. To be the. Aspirational. Equivalent. Of the christian message.

So this ought to be. A real encouragement. To us. And it ought to be. A corrective. To the church. Let me just. Let me now. Move toward the sermon.

[12 : 09] And I want you to see this. As clearly. And simply. As possible. There's a principle. Stated. In verses. 25 to 28. There are two reasons. Set down.

For that principle. In verses. 29 to 35. And then the summary. Which begins. In verse 36. Climaxes. In that. So then.

Of verse 38. So. So. There's a principle. There. There are arguments. That support it. And there's a summation. Of it. And it ought to be that.

Easy. To follow. What is the principle. Then. That is put forward. Regarding the fullness. Of the scriptures. Teaching on marriage. In light of the gospel.

Let's read again. Verses 25. Through 28. Now concerning the betrothed. I have no command. From the Lord. But give my judgment. As one.

[13 : 07] Who by the Lord's mercy. Is trustworthy. I think that in view. Of the present distress. It is good for a person. To remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free.

Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry. You have not sinned. And if a betrothed woman marries. She has not sinned. Yet those who marry.

Will have worldly troubles. And I would spare you that. The principle is. To be married. Isn't sinful. But he would spare us. Of that.

By asking you to remain. As you are. Two questions on the principle. Who does he have in mind here. With the betrothed. And why is he addressing them at all. At this point in the text.

This would have been an easier sermon. If we'd been marching our way. Through first Corinthians. But we need to explore that. Who does he have in mind? Who are the betrothed? Which by the way. Carry the fullness.

[14 : 02] Of the message. Because you'll see that same word again. In verse 36. And that same word again. In verse 38. Or 37.

Three times over. Who are the betrothed? Literally. Who are the virgins? If one thinks of the Greco-Roman world. In which this was written.

There were certainly. In the temples. Of the Roman gods. Virgins. Who had decided. To not marry. And service to those gods.

But I don't think that's what. He has in mind here. I also don't think. He has in mind. Simply those who are unmarried. Virgins. I don't think here. Simply means. If you're not married.

I think. It probably means. In light of what he's talking about. At the end. About going through. With that vow. And actually becoming married. Someone who. I guess you would say. Would be engaged.

[14 : 57] Engaged. Which by the way. Of announcement. Another in my family. Did so last night. Okay.

Now. If you had left me. You were back. But you didn't hear what I said. So. I've got another son. That's engaged. What do you do?

Should you be going through with marriage? Should you be pulling out of marriage? Should you be seeking marriage? Should you be seeking to be released from these vows? These promises? I think if you look at the principle there.

In regard to being bound to a wife. Or seeking to be free from a wife. It could easily be translated from. A woman herself.

Are you promised to one? Are you not promised to one? If you go through with marriage. That's fine. But I would spare you of that.

[15 : 58] The principle is in that regard. Why is he addressing this in the first place? Well you have to go back. To this opening line here. Now concerning these betrothed.

And turn one page back to chapter 7 verse 1. Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

And that's in quotes. Evidently the Corinthian church. Young in the faith. Had written Paul a letter. And they had questions concerning. Now that I'm a Christian.

What do I do with my body? What does it mean in regard to marriage? Singleness? Divorce? Remarriage? And he's addressing this matter.

And it looks like he's addressing it in the context of a quotation. Which either came from his letter to them that we don't have. Or what was being attributed to Paul in regard to his view.

[16 : 56] Namely that it's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. So the situation is most likely this. Paul has written to them to say.

It's not really good to be in sexual union with a woman. And some are saying. He thinks marriage is sinful. And there are others who are saying.

If you really want to be spiritual. You get on in life with Jesus. And you put away all other earthly relationships in regard to marriage. Or it could be a sense of what we do physically by way of pleasure in a marriage situation.

Is something denigrated. And since we won't be doing it in heaven. We ought to forego it even now. So what he is saying here. He's addressing an issue concerning a letter.

Contributed to statements that are attributed to him. Paul is either being misunderstood. Paul is being misrepresented. They are misreading him. And so he's now clarifying.

[17 : 56] What does he mean? And it certainly means something for us. It means this at least. The situation in Corinth.

Is very different than the situation in Chicago. I don't know of anyone who. Fully advances the view of asceticism. Today that would indicate marriage itself is sinful.

I'm sure there are some out there. But that's not Chicago. The issue at stake for them is different than the issue at stake for us.

Their setting is not our situation. But that's the setting of the text. So the implication is this. What Paul is saying by way of principle. Choose whether or not to go through with marriage.

He's not forcing you to choose between right and wrong. He's not forcing you to do something that you can celebrate in. Or something that's sinful. He's simply saying marriage is permissible.

[18 : 59] But in his mind not preferred. It's a good thing. But he considers singleness a better thing.

That's the principle laid down. What are the reasons he sets that down? Take a look at 29 through 35.

He's going to give you two reasons. Paul's preferential option for singleness. First, in 29 to 31, there's something about the beginning of the way that sounds.

Where he talks about the time being short. And then something about the end of the way that sounds. About the world passing away. That provide a reason for his preference of singleness.

Let me read it to you. 29. 29. This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. Now look at all these things he's going to load in the middle.

[20 : 06] From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none. And those who mourn as though they were not mourning. And those who rejoice as they were not rejoicing. And those who buy as they had no goods.

And those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. Now here's the other bracket. For the present form of this world is passing away. Why does he prefer singleness? Because the time is short and the present world is passing away.

Which for him informs all the things in the middle. It doesn't mean here when he says, if you're married you live as though you don't have a wife. As if you're not supposed to care for her.

It's not what he's saying. He's saying, we now live between two worlds on the basis of what Jesus has done. Now let me see if I can hit this for you.

What's the nature of this first argument? It's not so much about science as it is theology. It's not so much about the material world as the spiritual implication. Now you may be a non-Christian here today.

[21 : 09] And many of you are coming along and listening to these messages this year. And we are in conversation with one another not only through these sermons. But through our interpersonal relationships.

And you may have rejected everything that was said about human sexuality in the last two weeks. Concerning its exclusive relationship between a man and a woman. Between its lifelong commitments.

Between the fact that it ought to be celebrated. It ought to be entered into carefully. I mean you may disagree with all those things. And you also may disagree with this. You may agree that the physical material world in which we live is a resource that is ever depleting.

And strictly speaking scientifically over billions of years this thing is going to end. But that's not what Paul has in mind here. He's got something more than science in his corner.

He's got something spiritually he's trying to say. He's trying to say that this world has been fundamentally altered by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[22 : 21] In which another world wherein the rule of God is exemplified has broken in. And it's that other world that is going to overtake everything that you and I know to be true around us.

What he's saying here is that Jesus' death and resurrection is the in-breaking of the garden.

And it will be restored. And because of that. And because of his kingdom and rule. And the fact that marriage itself was to reveal what Christ and the church would be.

Then marriage itself as the end of life isn't what you ought to be seeking. But rather your union with Christ so that a single person equally represents the glory of the gospel as they give themselves to Jesus and to the body of Christ.

And they exemplify fully, completely, without inadequacy at all. What Jesus came to do.

[23 : 35] And that world has pressed in. And therefore, Paul says, Live now.

What most people will begin to grasp is the future. Because the future has already entered into the now. Now. So start living for the kingdom, he says.

Singleness is preferred because this world is passing away already. You might as well begin living according to the spiritual reality of what's happened in the fullness of Jesus.

Singleness is preferred because it embraces the new order. Singleness is preferred because our eternal lot will be as individuals within the family of God.

Each of which represents in some sense the bride to the bridegroom. Singleness is preferred because you don't need marriage to provide a representation or a picture of Christ to the world.

[24 : 50] You need your participation in the bride. You need your participation in the church as the bride. There's a second reason. It's really in the following verses there, 32 to 35.

And just as one reason is that the time is short and the present world is passing away, so also he prefers singleness here.

Or he's demonstrating the advantageous nature of singleness. Because marriage will by nature produce troubles, while singleness allows you some measure of being undivided.

At least that's the logic. Let me read it again slowly. Verse 32, second reason. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.

But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife. And his interests are divided. And the unmarried or the betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy and body in spirit.

[25 : 55] But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint on you, but to promote good order and secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Singleness is preferred because marriage increases anxieties and limits undivided attention. That's the advantages of singleness.

It spares you from some difficulties. There's not a married person here who wouldn't express to you that yes, in the one flesh, lifelong, covenantal relationship, those covenantal bonds have of necessity forced us and continually ask us to pay attention to things that will just retain this, protect this, guard this, remake this.

In ways that a single person hasn't had to walk through. Get this straight.

It doesn't mean that a single person has more time than a married person. It means that the purview of necessity and attention to particular things is not the same as a married person.

[27 : 35] They're distinct differences. And what he says is he prefers singleness because you're not carrying around some anxieties that someone else is carrying around with.

And you say, but pastor, I got all kinds of anxieties on my own. Yeah, well, I freed you from one today. And that's, you have no need to get married.

That's a false anxiety that the church has thrown at you for some time. So there's a sparing of difficulties and there's a singularity of focus.

Now let's just stop on that for a moment. Implicit in this then is the church would do well to pay attention to this. I bet at least half our congregation is single.

And I expect that that will remain that way for the next 50 years. I anticipate that half our congregation is going to be single. It ought to be championed.

[28 : 39] It ought to be leveraged. It ought to be understood. It ought to be celebrated. Now, you know me, I'm a grandpa.

So I'm going to celebrate every child born. I'm going to celebrate every engagement made. But we need to celebrate. Champion.

Articulate a view. That singleness. Provides for an undivided. Attention to the Lord. That ought to catapult the growth of the gospel in this city and in this neighborhood.

And we're not close yet to leveraging that. But it ought to happen. The principle, 25 to 28.

Simply put, Paul would spare us of the aspiration of marriage. The reasons for it, 29 to 35.

[29 : 45] Because this world is already passing away. And there's an aspect of singularity of focus. The summation of the argument then starts out in verse 36.

It almost looks as though he's drawing everything together. But it's moving toward those two first words in verse 38, isn't it? So then. But let's see how he moves it.

If anyone thinks he's not behaving properly toward his betrothed, verse 36, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes, let them marry. It's no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity, but having his desire under control, and is determined in his heart to keep her as a betrothed, he will do well.

In other words, go through with marriage, or don't go through with marriage. both are under the hand of God. So then, he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who retains, refrains from marriage, will do even better.

That's the summation of the Scriptures. You want to live wisely in the coming year?

[31 : 12] Reorient your aspiration. The aspiration is to remain. And it ought to be championed by an understanding of the Scriptures that validates the full, completeness of the individual.

and give yourself to the things of God, whether married or not.

Wise living. What is there for you in the year to come? For some of us, physical suffering is in this calendar year, and we don't even know it yet.

from the book of Job, may we learn how to enter into it. May we learn how to help others through it.

Some of us need a voice of the soul, the language of song, if we're going to endure in the coming year. May the psalms of thanksgiving and lament and praise of his King sustain us.

[32 : 33] Some of us need circumstantial wisdom that in one place is right and another place would have been foolish. Whether it mean the use of our money or our movement through life.

May the proverbial wisdom of Christ, the fullness of wisdom, be yours. Some of us need a reorientation this year in regard to our pursuits. May the book of Ecclesiastes feed you all the rest of the year.

And may that final message of Ecclesiastes sit upon you. Remember God in the days of your youth amidst all the things you're chasing down.

some of us need wisdom on sexuality. We need a pattern because the church is entirely confused.

We need to praise the pattern, exalt in the pattern, just as the others in the Song of Solomon are onlookers but not participants, yet cherish it.

[33 : 41] And some of us in the coming year need to come to full understanding that our singleness is no deterrent to usefulness.

More than that, it's no negative implication to my personhood. More than that, that we have to give ourselves to one another.

For the time is short. Our devotion needs to be undivided. This church, the coming year, live wisely.

Our Heavenly Father, we conclude this opening set of 2019 asking that you would apply all the various messages from this series to the heart of the individual but also to the heart of our church collectively.

And help us, O God, to live well with one another as we live undividedly for you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[35 : 08] Amen.