

Biblical Counsel for Marriage, Singleness and All of Life (Part 1)

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Date: 23 March 2025

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[0:00] The sermon text for today is 1 Corinthians 7, 1 through 16.! At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare,! It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.

Likewise, sorry, old eyes, I guess. Not supposed to need bifocals yet. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

[1:33] Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

To the married, I give this charge. Not I, but the Lord. The wife should not separate from her husband, but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

And the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say, I, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

[2:41] Otherwise, your children would be unclean. But as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved.

God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? This is the word of the Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. And now, Lord, would the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Oh, good morning, Shoreline. I just want to say again, if you're new here, welcome. And if you're not, welcome.

So glad that all of us are able to join together in corporate worship to the Lord. We are in the middle of a series in the book of 1 Corinthians as we consider the church's call to display Christ in all things.

[3:54] That's our pursuit as a church this year. We keep coming back to over and over again to display Christ, to live consistently with the gospel in all of life. The last week we took a break from 1 Corinthians to consider a biblical vision for membership in the local church.

And today we're picking back up in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. So if you haven't turned there already, please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 7. There should be Bibles in the back table.

If you don't have a Bible, you're welcome to keep that as a gift to you. The title of today's sermon is Biblical Counsel for Marriage, Singleness, and All of Life.

Biblical Counsel, this is Paul's Biblical Counsel to us for marriage, singleness, and all of life. And it says part 1. Part 1 because we're going to take this chapter, chapter 7, in three different sections. I was originally going to cover through verse 24 today. That's what the email said. But I've decided to limit this to verses 1 through 16. And next week will be just in verses 17 through 24.

[4:59] They each merit their own discussion. So that's what we're covering today, verses 1 through 16. That said, you know, we're taking this in three parts, but I believe that there is a unifying thread through chapter 7 that we're going to keep coming back to over the next three weeks.

And it's this. If you could put that on the screen. Having purchased us by His blood. So this is what I think the main point of all of the chapter 7 is. Having purchased us by His blood, Christ calls the saints to faithful obedience and contentment in marriage, singleness, and all of life as we await His return.

We're going to see how Paul is conveying this message as we move forward. Now if you look only at verses 1 through 16, it would be possible to walk away disregarding the centrality of Christ and the gospel.

To disregard the eternal perspective that we ought to have as Christians. And these are things which Paul has been driving the Corinthians to time and again. And he continues to do that even in this chapter, especially as we move into the other verses.

So even though we're zooming in today on the topics of marriage, singleness, divorce, and remarriage, these topics cannot be stripped of their gospel context.

[6:19] See, we're really good at allowing the gospel to shape certain aspects of our lives. And then with other aspects, telling God, you know, this far you shall come and no further.

But saints, God deserves and demands every little piece of our hearts and lives. And the gospel of Jesus Christ ought to affect every part of us.

So this is part of a preamble here. Key, if you could put that one on the screen. The gospel of Jesus Christ ought to affect every part of us. It's kind of like the rising sun. If you can picture the sun coming up for a moment.

You know, at first light, the sun's effect is immediately seen, right? But the shadows continue to lessen as the sun rises higher and higher in the sky. So in our hearts, in our lives, God wants the light of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ to shine ever brighter and more direct, dispelling the shadows of sin and darkness.

And so, the rising sun of the gospel ought to change everything, including how we speak, how we manage our schedule and finances, how we treat one another in the church, and yes, how we view marriage, sex, remarriage, and singleness.

[7:34] Okay, so again, this is all sort of a preamble to getting into the text itself, which we're going to do, I promise. But before we do that, there's two questions that I want us to ask and answer.

And here's the first one. And maybe you were thinking this as we read through. Why should I care about Paul's words if they're not directed at me? If I'm single, why should I pay attention to what Paul says to marrieds and vice versa?

Now, that's a really good question. And I want to offer you two reasons. The first one, we should care because this is the divinely inspired word of the living God.

So it's good for us to pay careful attention to everything that he says. But the second thing, we should care because we're a family with siblings. Okay, look around the room for a second.

We are a family. We are a body. We talked a lot about this last week. Some of this content might not directly affect you, but it affects the brothers and sisters around you.

[8:36] And you're called to love and to serve and to disciple them. We're called to do those things for one another. If you're married, you ought to know what God says to singles because you're called to help your brothers and sisters, including the singles around you, to follow Jesus.

This is living out the Great Commission. If you're single, you ought to know what God says to husbands and wives because you're called to speak the truth in love, Ephesians 4.15, to your fellow members, including the marrieds in this room.

So Mike, Mike, are you telling me that if I'm single, I'm called to hold the marrieds accountable even in their marriage? How do I have a right to speak into their marriage when I'm not married?

That is what I'm telling you, in fact. And you do have a right, and the Bible says even a responsibility. Now maybe this analogy will help. So we support my father-in-law, Randy Matthews. He goes all around the world preaching the gospel and investing in leaders, indigenous leaders, to reach their own. He goes regularly to believers who are persecuted for their faith.

[9:48] Right? And I've talked to him a number of times about how pretentious he often feels going to these brothers and sisters who risk imprisonment and beatings and even death for the sake of Christ.

But this leads him to a profound sense of humility, first and foremost. These believers are laying it all on the line for Christ in a way that he may never have to do.

And also, he can teach and exhort with confidence because he's not just bringing them Randy Matthews' ideas. He's bringing them the word of God on the authority of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. So with us, church, when we counsel one another, we ought always do so in profound humility. Especially when we have never or will never walk the path a fellow brother or sister in Christ is walking.

And we ought always to be guided in love, which Paul is driving us to chapter 13. Everything is done in love. But we can also counsel one another in confidence.

[10:57] So long as we seek to bring the words of God, scripture, to rightly bear on each other's lives because it is the true, it is the wise, it is the powerful word of God.

So the topic of counsel brings me to the second question and it's this. What do we learn from Paul's shift in tone and approach? Did you notice the dramatic shift from chapter 6 to chapter 7?

So throughout chapters 1 through 6, Paul has been addressing these black and white issues of sin within the church and into these situations Paul speaks with corrective clarity.

He's firm, he's direct, especially in chapters 5 and 6. But now we move into chapter 7 and Paul goes from addressing clear sin to questions that the Corinthians are actually bringing to him on these specific matters.

and they're asking for his wisdom. These matters are not as clear cut and they require pastoral wisdom, pastoral sensitivity. And so in light of that, Paul softens in his approach.

[12:06] He's seeking to bring gospel principles to bear on specific situations for which they're seeking out his counsel. So church, this is instructive for us as to how we counsel one another.

Black and white matters of sin call for a level of corrective clarity and firmness, especially when sin is being hidden or is unrepentant.

Whereas matters that are more gray, they require a less dogmatic, more nuanced approach and a softness, especially when someone is seeking out wise counsel.

So as we seek to apply biblical principles to these, you know, real life situations, the best path forward for one might not be the best path forward for somebody else.

There's no cookie cutter approach here. But the call for both, to drive us back to the main point here of this chapter, the call for both is faithful obedience to Christ and contentment in all things as we await his return.

[13:11] Okay, the preamble's over. Let's get into the text. Here is the first point that we see in verses one through six on marriage. Marital intimacy preserves holiness and promotes self-giving love.

Look in your Bibles in verse one. Paul says, now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

Now we're going to see first how Paul uses that formula, now concerning. Throughout the rest of the letter, we're going to keep saying, now concerning this, now concerning this. He's going to move from topic to topic, answering questions raised by the Corinthians in a letter that they sent to him.

The first topic concerns sexual intimacy and marriage. Now most of your Bibles probably have quotes around the phrase, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

And that's because Paul is most likely quoting the Corinthians from their letter. Historically, sometimes people did not realize that and it led to sort of a misinterpretation of what Paul's saying. [14:19] We believe these to be Paul's or the Corinthians words that Paul is then quoting. And what we see here and throughout this chapter is a strain of asceticism within the Corinthian church.

So asceticism, it's the practice of severe self-discipline to achieve, to attempt to achieve this higher spiritual life. It sees the body as restrictive and then it seeks to deny bodily desires for the sake of spiritual growth.

Now the danger, like many dangerous things, is that it takes a good desire, you know, communion with God, that's a good desire, but then it twists that into something unbiblical.

Now this ascetic strain was leading some Corinthians to view sex as categorically bad, even within the context of a marriage. And if we step back, how interesting that in chapter 6, Paul's addressing those who were indulging their sexual desires.

In chapter 7, Paul is addressing those who are denying their sexual desires. And in both cases, there's a misunderstanding of God's good intention. If there's a ditch to fall into on the left side of the road, there's usually a ditch to fall into on the right side of the road.

[15:38] So I just want to say, God help us to stay on the level path. So with this misguided ascetic perspective, the Corinthians are basically asking Paul, should married couples refrain from sexual intimacy?

So that's the question here. And Paul says, verse 2, but because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

That but, it means on the contrary, in other words, you say, Corinthians, that it's good for a man not to be with his wife. But I say, in light of the temptation to sexual immorality, that spouses should engage in sexual intimacy.

The apostle Paul does not live in an idealistic, sort of, head-in-the-cloud state. He understands real life. He understands that God made our bodies a certain way.

I mean, he just addressed the sin of going to prostitutes in chapter 6. He knows how strong sexual temptation can be. And so he's urging here married couples for the sake of holiness to engage in marital intimacy.

[16:48] Now, if you look also down at verse 5, he urges spouses to come together so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

See, Paul's concern is for believers to avoid sexual immorality because why? Because they belong to the Lord. He's urging them to live lives of holiness. I mean, it was only a few verses ago at the end of chapter 6, Paul said, do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you whom you have from God?

You are not your own. You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. So Paul's first answer to the question, should married couples refrain from sexual intimacy is no.

Marital intimacy preserves holiness. If you can put that on the screen, Kev. You belong to the Lord, he's saying, so give yourself to him in holiness.

But he doesn't stop there. Look at verse 3. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.

[17:58] Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. So here's his second response. Should married couples refrain from sexual intimacy?

No. Marital intimacy promotes self-giving love. He doesn't say this explicitly, but this is what I think he's driving at. You belong to the Lord and you also belong to your spouse.

So give yourself to them in love. Now first, in our current day, it's hard to understand how radical these words would have been to a first century culture in which equality between men and women was non-existent.

The mutuality of Paul's commands, it flows out of the Judeo-Christian belief in the Imago Dei, that we are born, that all humans are born in the image of God with equal worth and equal dignity.

We're all born equal in his eyes. And so he calls here not just the wives to give to their husbands, he calls the husbands and wives equally to give themselves to their spouse in sexual intimacy.

[19:06] And I want you to note the key word is give. It's give. Paul does not say, husbands, your wife's body belongs to you so you can demand of her whatever and whenever you want.

No, no, no. He says, the husband should give to his wife. Marriage, like all of our relationships, is about self-giving love.

It's about self-giving love. Paul goes on to say, do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

And I think verse 6 actually points back to verse 5. So let's read verse 6. Now is a concession, not a command, I say this. So here, Paul is making a concession, an allowance, for his urging of spouses to give themselves to one another in intimacy.

And that is, in rare cases and by mutual, mutual agreement, for some spiritual purpose, it's okay to refrain from sexual intimacy. But then he says, quickly follows it up with, come back together again so you don't fall into temptation.

[20:23] So he's not commanding spouses to refrain. He's simply giving an allowance for it. If these conditions are met, marital celibacy is okay. Now perhaps they wanted to vote all their attention to seeking the Lord fervently over some matter, whether a family matter or a church matter or a national matter.

He doesn't tell us exactly what these cases would be. They may decide to refrain in order to do that, but then come together again, Paul says. Married couples.

God is calling us this morning not to a right, but to a responsibility. Okay? He is calling us not to a demand, but to a duty. God is calling us to give ourselves away in self-giving love to our spouses. Husbands, this text should never be used to manipulate your wife. The reverse is of course also true, but I'm especially talking to husbands.

This is not spiritual leverage to tell your wife what to do in this area. This text ought to compel us, husbands and wives, for the sake of Christ and our spouses to give ourselves away.

[21:38] Not seeking our own interests, but rather those of our spouse. Now Paul is not giving us here, this is important for the whole chapter, Paul's not giving us a treatise on marriage in this chapter.

This is not everything there is to say about marriage. He's addressing specific problems within the Corinthian church and he's applying biblical wisdom to these problems. So we also, as we seek to apply this chapter in all of God's word, we need to consider the whole counsel of God's word.

Paul is the same apostle who wrote Ephesians 5, 22 through 33, that beautiful picture of marriage as that of Christ, a reflection of Christ in the church.

So we should also be looking at that when we're trying to get a broader picture of marriage. We consider all of what God has to say. Now within the context of 1 Corinthians even, in chapter 7, Paul is telling Christians that in whatever circumstances of life they find themselves in right there, right there, right where you're planted.

That was really good, Garrett. Right where you're planted. He's calling married couples to be content and he's calling them towards faithful obedience. And so here is one way that is lived out in marriage.

[22:56] Husbands, make yourselves available to your wives. Wives, make yourselves available to your husbands. And Paul is saying this is a guard against sexual immorality, preserving holiness, and this is a way that you can reflect Christ in self-giving love.

To everyone here, if you're not married, there is also a word here for you. Now first, following what I said at the beginning, these are God's words to husbands and wives.

There may be, there may be a time in which you need to, in humility and gentleness and love, call a husband or a wife to heed these commands.

But even more than that, though it takes all sorts of other forms, the giving of yourself to God in holiness and the giving of yourself in sacrificial love to others is the call of every Christian.

All of us are called to Christ-like love in all of our relationships. I mean, this is a reflection of the gospel. Jesus, the Lord of the universe, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, right?

[24:11] He emptied himself, taking on the form of a man, becoming a servant, becoming the suffering servant who died in the place of sinners for love.

Jim was just preaching to us before that we have been forgiven and redeemed and adopted because of what Jesus has done by the majestic love of the triune God.

And Christ calls, then, all of his disciples to reflect that self-giving love in all of our relationships. So all of us are called, all of us are called to this Christ-like self-giving love.

Paul then moves in verse 7 through 9 to a specific word for the unmarried and widows. So here's the second thing that we see here. On singleness. Like marriage, it's a good gift from God.

Paul says in verse 7, I wish that all were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

[25:25] When Paul says, as I myself am, we understand that to refer to his being single. And then, in the very next phrase, he describes singleness and marriage as a gift of God.

The Greek word there is charisma. We're going to see that word in chapter 12. We actually saw it in chapter 1. It's a grace gift. Both marriage and singleness, Paul is saying, are grace gifts.

They're gifts of God's grace apportioned out to the saints. And then he specifically addresses the unmarried and widows in verse 8. To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.

But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. Again, Paul elevates singleness as a good thing.

But he's also realistic. He knows the sexual temptation that may come for some who are single and he urges believers who struggle with that towards marriage.

[26:35] And the question Paul is seeking to answer here for the Corinthians is, should, this is kind of obvious, but should the unmarried and the widows seek to marry? That's the question that I think they're asking.

And behind this question is a culture in the first century in which singleness was far more rare, especially among women who were generally married at extremely young ages.

And single women were particularly vulnerable and would seek to remarry or to marry as soon as possible. And against that cultural stream, Paul is sort of pushing back.

He's saying remaining single is an equally viable path and it might even be, it might even be the better path. And so that's Paul's answer here.

Should the unmarried and widows seek to marry? He's saying it depends. It depends on the person. It depends on the situation. But view singleness as a gift like marriage.

[27:34] If you could put that on the screen, Kev. Whether married, unmarried, widowed, or divorced, as we're going to see, the Christian's call is to contentment and faithful obedience to Christ.

Paul is exhorting all believers, no matter what status or station in life to slow down and to not believe the lie that my circumstances need to change in order for me to be content.

Or my circumstances need to change in order for me to maximize my fruitfulness for God's kingdom. Paul is seeking to bring about a perspective shift, right, in which believers aren't focused on what are my rights right now, but rather how can I best glorify God in my current circumstances? Now next week this is going to be the main focus of the sermon as we look at verses 17 through 24 and then in two weeks we are going to more fully address singleness as we look at verse 25 to 40. But before we move on for today, I want to speak to singles specifically and then to everyone.

Singles, I just want to say I think it's probably the case in conservative evangelical circles that even if unknowingly we treat singleness sometimes as inferior to marriage and we view it as a place of lack rather than as a gift of God's grace.

[29:04] And I am, I'm sorry if you've personally felt devalued by my own words or my own actions or by those of the church. And I want to say today on the authority of God's word that singleness like marriage is a gift and more than that you are a gift to this church and to the church.

And if you're struggling in your singleness please do not keep that struggle to yourself. Talk to a brother or sister. Talk to a community group leader. Talk to me or one of the other pastors that are

here.

We are here to carry one another's burdens. So please don't carry yours alone. We would love to come alongside you. To everyone here let us uphold this truth that like marriage singleness is a gift from God and therefore ought to be regarded as such.

You know we've been talking quite a bit recently about how the gospel tears down the natural dividing walls that this world seeks to impose. Right? Whether of race or ethnicity or gender or social status or whatever.

Well we can add marital status to that list as well. All of us whether married or single divorced or widowed are one in Christ.

[30:22] Amen? All of us. So we should be seeking to move towards one another in love regardless of differences. Welcoming one another as Christ welcomed us.

Singleness like marriage is a good gift from God. There is so much more to say but we're going to save some more of that for two weeks from now. And Paul turns now to address marriage and divorce.

On marriage and divorce marriage is a lifetime commitment. Verse 10 he says to the married I give this charge not I but the Lord.

The wife should not separate from her husband but if she does she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband and the husband should not divorce his wife.

First I want to address these weird parenthetical statements that Paul makes in verse 10 when he says not I but the Lord and then in verse 12 when he says I not the Lord.

[31:24] Is Paul saying that we can that we must obey his instructions from the Lord but then we can kind of just take or leave his other instructions which are just his opinion? Short answer no.

When Paul says not I but the Lord he's talking about Jesus referring specifically to Jesus' own teaching during his earthly ministry and when Paul says I not the Lord he's saying these instructions aren't specifically the words of Christ but I'm bringing them to you based on my apostolic authority right?

Based on the application of biblical principles so we need to just keep in mind here everything that Paul says in his letter everything written in the word is the Holy Spirit inspired words of God and it's for our instruction and for our good.

Okay so what good instruction does Paul give us here? Paul charges men and women alike in accordance with Jesus' own words to remain committed and faithful to their spouses and not to seek divorce.

The word separate in verse 10 could throw us off. It's not our modern usage of the word separate. It's simply a synonym for divorce and the question Paul is seeking to answer is can I divorce my spouse?

[32:44] Can I divorce my spouse? Some may have asked in the vein of this ascetic mindset that we talked about earlier. Perhaps they thought that if sexual intimacy is bad and if singleness is preferred then one should just get divorced and then be freed up to do gospel work.

Paul was probably also addressing the prevailing cultural mindset in which a husband could divorce his wife for basically any reason he wanted. So to both the former and the latter mindset Paul applies the instruction of Christ and he says no.

Can I divorce my spouse? No. Marriage is a lifetime commitment. It's an exclusive lifetime covenant commitment. That's what we see in God's word and he's saying therefore do not seek divorce.

Now we're going to move forward to the next set of verses but then we're going to come back to address two lingering questions that are raised by this text. Are there any exceptions for divorce and then what about remarriage?

And I think both of these will be better answered after looking at verses 12 through 16. In those verses Paul moves to a different question. Should I divorce my unbelieving spouse?

[33:57] That's the question here in 12 through 16. To the rest I say, I not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. So here's Paul's basic answer as he seeks to bring God's word to bear on this situation in the Corinthian church.

His answer is the same, right? He says no. Should you divorce your unbelieving spouse? No. Marriage is a lifetime commitment. And then he provides some additional reasoning.

Look at verse 14. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. Okay, so this is at first confusing. But reading only two verses later, it shows us that Paul is not talking about salvation.

[35:04] Look at verse 16. For how do you know wife whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know husband whether you will save your wife? The implied answer, you don't know, right?

You don't know that your unbelieving spouse or children will come to believe in Jesus Christ. So what is Paul actually saying in verse 14? Now remember that the word holy, it literally means set apart.

What Paul is saying here, there is a sense in which an unbelieving spouse or child of a believer is specially set apart. How? Well consider, they have Christ in that believing spouse living before their very lives, right?

They have someone committed to the gospel living out that gospel in their own home. They have a greater advantage than an entirely unbelieving house to come to faith in Jesus and so be saved. Paul had just said in chapter 6, if you remember, that one who is joined to the Lord ought not join oneself with a prostitute. So perhaps the Corinthians thought the same principle applied to an unbelieving spouse.

[36:17] So Paul is assuring them, no it doesn't. You are not defiled by your unbelieving spouse, but in fact, your holy, gospel-centered, Christ-exalting life just might be what God uses to bring them to saving faith in Jesus.

And that's an encouragement for those who are living in this exact situation. I just want to pause here for a word of application. First, to the marrieds in this room, to all the marrieds in this room, commit yourself, what Paul is calling us towards, is for us to commit ourselves afresh to our husband or wife.

God's intention is for us to faithfully uphold the exclusive lifetime covenant commitment that we entered into, right, when we said, I do.

God has called us to this. He's called us to a holy contentment, to a faithful obedience in the marriage that he has placed us.

God has called us to those who are married to an unbelieving spouse. You have a unique challenge to live for Christ even while your spouse doesn't.

[37:28] And yet, Paul shows us a unique opportunity to witness to your spouse and children through your Christ-reflecting words and deeds. So, Peter writes in 1 Peter 3, 1 and 2, he's talking to wives, but I think this applies also to husbands.

Likewise, wives, not the first part, the second, be subject to your own husbands so that even if some do not obey the word, okay, listen to this, even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Marriage is a lifetime commitment. And then Paul includes this exception here. Verse 15, But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so.

In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. So, once again, we see Paul is grounded in reality.

You know, there's a reason. So, in 2 Corinthians, Paul writes not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship, he says, has light with darkness?

[38:40] Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? You know, if you read throughout the book of Acts and if you read church history, we see a variety of responses to the gospel from acceptance to indifference to hostility.

Now, it may be that the gospel-shaped life of a believer is actually repulsive to an unbelieving spouse who then wants to dissolve the marriage.

So, in this case of abandonment, it's called, or desertion of the believing spouse by the unbelieving spouse, Paul says, let it be so. You are not enslaved.

You're not bound, in other words. If the unbelieving spouse desires divorce, you are free to allow it. So, that's the second part of his answer. But in the case of abandonment or desertion, you are not bound.

So, this brings us back to that first lingering question I raised earlier. Are there any exceptions for divorce? We said marriage is a lifetime commitment.

[39:44] Are there exceptions? Well, we just saw one of them, that of abandonment or desertion. And Jesus, consistent with the Mosaic law, he asserts another one, sexual immorality, *porneia*, also as grounds for divorce.

And you can find this in Matthew 5, 32, and Matthew 19, verse 9. Now, some argue against this conclusion for various reasons, which I don't have time to go into today.

I simply want to state the current position of the elders of Shoreline. And that is that we believe divorce is permissible, though never required, on the grounds of sexual immorality or desertion.

This is historically probably the most commonly held Protestant view on the permissibility of divorce. Now, as a side note, but it's very important, so it's a worthy side note.

It should be emphasized in light of the fact that spousal abuse is far too common, both outside and inside the church. that God is a protector and a stronghold for the oppressed.

[40:57] David writes in Psalm 140, verse 12, I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted and will execute justice for the needy. That is a guarantee that we're going to see fulfilled in heaven.

But God wants that justice manifested on the earth right now, especially among his people. As such, the church of Jesus Christ ought to be a haven for the oppressed.

If you are enduring oppression from a spouse, please get help and know that we would love to be that help here in this church. Okay, let's move now to that second lingering question.

What about remarriage? What about remarriage? marriage? In verse 11, Paul says, look at verse 11, Paul says that if a woman does divorce her husband, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

However, it is possible to see these words as Paul only referring to illegitimate divorces.

Remember, he is upholding the intention of marriage as a lifetime commitment.

[42:14] He is not saying everything there is to say about marriage. He did not bring up what Jesus said in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19. So it is possible to see these words as Paul talking only about illegitimate divorces.

That is a divorce not on biblical grounds. It is possible. In verse 15, Paul says, and I look at verse 15, he says that for the believer who has been abandoned by an unbelieving spouse, the brother or sister is not enslaved.

Now, he could be referring only to freedom to get a divorce, but that could also be seen as freedom to remarry since the divorce was on legitimate grounds.

So again, there are multiple sides. There's multiple ways to view things. There are other scripture passages that we need to bring to bear on this complex topic. And I just want to say where the elders of Shoreline currently stand in this.

And that is that we lean in the direction of seeing remarriage as a viable biblically faithful option for those who have been divorced on biblical grounds.

[43:21] And then as prohibited for those who have been divorced on illegitimate grounds. That is that have been divorced not on biblical grounds. But church, in considering the wise path forward in complex matters like these, matters involving divorce and remarriage, and then all sorts of other complex matters where scripture is not abundantly clear or explicit, we must remember that every situation is unique.

Every situation, it requires specific wisdom, specific sensitivity. It requires humility and love. And above all, a desire to honor the Lord.

David. Kevin DeYoung said it well in a sermon that he gave on divorce and remarriage. There are as many scenarios as there are couples in the world.

How do we know what's right in each situation, especially when so many of the scenarios have no parallel in scripture? The simple thing is to turn a blind eye to divorce in the church.

Just pretend it doesn't happen. Don't ask people about it. Don't bring it up. Don't say anything during a membership interview. The hard thing is to take a few biblical principles about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and then try to apply them prayerfully and wisely to a thousand different scenarios.

[44:46] Our desire here is to do the hard thing. It's to seek to apply the biblical principles that God has given us prayerfully and wisely in whatever situations arise.

And so for those who are in such situations, we would urge them to seek the Lord's will through careful study of scripture. Seek the Lord's will through prayer.

And seek out wise counsel, especially from your pastors or from other mature voices in the church. Proverbs 11, 14, where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors, there is safety.

Today has been another week of considering how faith in Christ and the gospel applies to some of life's most sensitive and difficult areas.

In today's passage, it hits close to home for many and in various ways. What an opportunity we have, church, as a body, to bear one another's burdens.

[45:57] What an opportunity we have in this church to rejoice with those who rejoice and to mourn with those who mourn. What an opportunity we have as we've been talking about to come alongside one another in humility and in self-giving love, to help one another walk in contentment in Christ and in faithful obedience to him as we wait for him to come back and to do that in all of life's circumstances.

Saints, Jesus Christ has purchased us by his blood. He's returning again soon to right all wrongs, to swallow up death and victory as we were just singing about, to usher in an everlasting age of love and joy and peace in his presence.

And that's the eternal perspective that we need to have as we seek to devote ourselves to him with all of our hearts and with all of our lives. So God grants us that perspective.

Please go with me in prayer.