

Biblical Counsel for Marriage Singleness and All of Life (Part 3)

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[0 : 00] The sermon text for today is 1 Corinthians 7, verses 25-40. At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare, this is the word of the Lord.

And the church, in joyful response to his revelation given to us, will say together, thanks be to God. Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one 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. This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as if 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. For in the present form of this world is, 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 him. 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.

[2 : 00] 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 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 heart, 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 lived. 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.

Yes, Lord, truly, this is the word of God. This is your timeless word given to the saints for our good, for our instruction, and for your glory. So Father, would you, as has already been prayed, Lord, would you speak to us, convict, encourage, strengthen our hearts through this text this morning? We pray by your Spirit. Amen. Good morning, church. My name is Mike. I'm one of the pastors here at Shoreline, and we are so glad that you guys have all joined us today for worship.

One of the people in this room that is visiting will appreciate this. Due to my strong sense of loyalty, and perhaps misplaced pride, I'm unfortunately for the rest of my life a Chicago Bears fan. You know, the last time, for those that are young, the last time they won a Super Bowl was a few years before I was born. And so every year we think it's going to be the year. Now, a very frustrating thing about the Bears, you probably don't watch the Bears if you're from around here. A very frustrating thing is how often they wait until the fourth quarter to do anything useful.

[4 : 22] But when you're a fourth quarter team and you're bad, you still end up losing anyway, unlike what you guys are used to, the Belichick-Brady franchise, you know, coming back in the fourth quarter. That doesn't happen with the Bears typically. But you know, all the procrastinators in this room, even if you don't watch sports, you can resonate with the Bears because there's a sense of urgency in the fourth quarter, right? The night before the test or the night before the project due

date or the night before tax day, which is coming up if you don't know. You finally feel in your spirit, this driving force to crowd out distractions and to focus on the task at hand. And you make changes as a result, right? You move to a no-huddle offense. You look for quick yard-gaining throws.

You know that every snap, every step, every decision matters. And that fourth quarter urgency is the kind of urgency that believers in Christ are called to manifest in their daily lives. We know, church, that time is limited. We know that Christ is coming again. And we know that our brief existence on this earth is only the gateway to eternity. Every word, every action, every choice matters because it's the fourth quarter. And everything carries with it an eternal significance. Well, this is the kind of mindset that Paul brings into view here in 1 Corinthians 7, 25 through 40. So if you haven't already turned there, please go there in your Bibles today. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles on the back table, including some large print Bibles. Thank you, Christina, for ordering. We've got new Bibles back there. Feel free to keep one if you don't have a Bible. We're walking through the book of 1 Corinthians this year as we consider the church's call to display Christ in all things.

And right now we're in the third of three weeks, specifically in chapter 7, in which we've been seeing, we've been hearing Paul give us counsel regarding marriage, singleness, and all of life. This is part three of three of Paul's counsel. You know, in verses 1 through 16, we considered Paul's counsel regarding marriage, singleness, and divorce. And then last week, verses 17 through 24, we saw basically the center and the heart of Paul's counsel in all of chapter 7, this guiding principle that Christians ought to remain in the condition in which they were called. In other words, in light of the gospel, they ought to care less about the specific circumstances in which God has placed them and more about contenting themselves in Christ and walking in faithful obedience to him.

[7 : 07] And in both weeks so far, we've put before us what I believe to be the unifying thread of chapter 7. And that is this, that 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.

Now this week, in verses 25 through 40, Paul expounds on the subject of singleness, which he had only briefly touched down in verses 7 through 9. And he's applying here the principle of verses 17 through 24, that central principle. And he's applying that specifically to those who have never married and then also to widows. And as he does that, Paul brings into this discussion this kind of fourth quarter urgency that ought to characterize all believers' lives in this world.

And so this week, I actually want to slightly alter the wording of our main point to sort of capture this sense of urgency. So here it is. It's having purchased us by his blood, Christ calls the saints to wholehearted devotion to him in marriage, singleness, and all of life in light of eternity and his imminent return. That is what I think is the main point of this passage, the main thrust.

And with that in mind, here is what Paul has to say specifically. So point number one here is, to those who have never married, Paul is saying singleness is good, and so is marriage.

This is from verse 25 through 38. So most of the text today is this one situation here. Verse 25, look in your Bibles. Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. Most of you probably have the ESV. What the ESV translates as betrothed is in almost every other translation translated as virgins or in others, the unmarried or those who have never been married. Now, I just want to state at the outset here, this passage is a very difficult passage for Bible translators. And this word here is one of those difficulties. But it's clear when we read through the whole text here, it's clear that Paul is speaking about those who have never married, whether they are currently engaged to be married, betrothed, or not. And in verse 26 through 28, Paul introduces his answer to the question that the Corinthians were probably asking. Remember that

[9 : 38] Paul has been given a letter from the Corinthian church with a whole bunch of questions. And so he's now walking through addressing these questions. And we've seen the word now concerning blank. And that's kind of the key for us now concerning. And he's going to move on to another topic now concerning the betrothed. So here we have the question and answer introduced in verses 25 through 28.

The question Paul is seeking to answer from the Corinthians is, should those who have never married pursue marriage? That's the question. Whether they stated that explicitly or had a specific case, that's the question. And Paul is saying here, he has no specific command from Jesus' teaching to offer. But in light of God's mercy, God's mercy to save Paul and fill him with the spirit

and with wisdom and call him to this apostolic role. In light of that mercy, he does have sound biblical counsel to offer the Corinthians. Now recall, if you've been walking with us through this letter, recall how the Corinthians prided themselves in having superior wisdom and knowledge and spiritual things. But Paul has shown them already how worldly their wisdom actually is in certain matters. As in the first few chapters, right? With their faction forming, you know, one-upmanship, their status-seeking. Now in this chapter, we've talked already about how Paul is countering the ascetics who practiced severe self-discipline in ways inconsistent with the word of God in order to somehow attain a higher spiritual life. So Paul is bringing true spiritual wisdom to bear in these situations. And so here, Paul, sort of tongue-in-cheek, offers his trustworthy judgment. And if you notice, the last verse of this section, Paul employs even more humor when he says, and I think that I too have the spirit of God. He's not like questioning whether he has the spirit. He's employing some humor over against the Corinthians that think they have wisdom and knowledge. Paul is bringing true spiritual wisdom in accordance with the word of the Lord to bear. And so what is Paul's trustworthy judgment? Look at verse 26.

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. At its most basic level, Paul's answer is basically this. It's good to remain single, but it's not wrong to be married. He just said it's basic level. In other words, is it, you know, should those who have not married pursue marriage? Well, it depends, Paul is saying. But singleness does have its advantages. Now, you can see Paul's pastoral sensitivity here as he seeks on the one hand to push against this ascetic mindset, which rejected marriage and sex as unspiritual, while on the other hand, he's pushing against the cultural pressure that people would feel to get married because that's just what you do. He's applying the principle that we saw in verses 17 through 24 that believers ought to remain in the condition in which they were called. What we talked about, that principle is not inflexible. It's not a rule, right? So in the present case concerning those who have never married, it's good to remain single, Paul says, but it's not wrong to be married. And then Paul gives three reasons for this answer. Three reasons for Paul's answer. And the first of three is right here in verses 26 through 28. Here's the first reason, the present distress.

[13 : 25] Paul says that in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is. Okay, what is the present distress? This has been the subject of much debate over the centuries. Some say that Paul is referring to a particular crisis that was going on in Corinth, perhaps a famine that was known to hit the region around that same time, perhaps persecution of Christians. Others say, based on the verses that follow, that Paul is speaking eschatologically, that is, he's talking about how we're living in the last days. Jesus predicted there would be calamities before his return. Well, actually, here's what Jesus said exactly in Matthew 24, verses 6 through 8. Jesus told his disciples, and you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.

For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. In light of Jesus's words, it seems unnecessary to draw a sharp distinction between a present crisis in Corinth and the last days before his return. A specific crisis going on in Corinth would only serve to underscore the reality of which Jesus speaks regarding the last days. So we don't necessarily need to draw a clear-cut line between present crisis and last days. Nevertheless, I want to say, Paul does seem to have some specific crisis in mind, and that's just based on the context of this chapter.

And whatever it is, whatever it is, his point is that this ought to be taken into consideration when deciding whether to pursue marriage or not. Okay, Paul is, we've said this over and over again, Paul is grounded in reality here. He knows that, look at verse 20, the end of verse 28, those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is very practical.

If there's a famine going on, it's harder to feed two or six or nine mouths than one, right? If there is persecution, caring for a spouse and children becomes extremely difficult. The commentator Leon Morris captured this idea very well. He said, when high seas are raging, it is no time for changing ships.

So this principle of remaining in the condition, if there's a present distress going on, perhaps it's better to remain in the condition in which they're called. Paul's encouraging those who have never

married to count the cost, to count the cost. He's saying, don't enter into such a weighty commitment as marriage, which it's with its very real and binding responsibilities without counting the cost, especially in light of this present crisis. But if you do marry, he quickly follows it up. But if you do marry, you have not sinned. So here there's Christian freedom. Like Paul seems to prefer singleness all throughout chapter seven, but he acknowledges that that marriage may be the better choice for some, and that's okay. Now this first reason, the present distress, it might not seem all that relevant to us in 21st century America. It might become more relevant in the days ahead. We don't know. But for those, think about those around the world right now who are experiencing persecution, who are experiencing various hardships, perhaps this text has much more relevance to them. And the other thing I want to say here before we move on, maybe the Lord would call some of you young people, especially, or anyone here, but maybe the Lord would call some of the young people in this room into full-time missions work, where conditions may be severe. And Paul's counsel here would actually take on a whole new relevance, right? And he's not saying don't marry in such situations, but he's saying realize if you do what the cost is going to be, right, to you, your potential spouse and family.

[17:33] Okay, now the second reason Paul lays down here is directly applicable to every Christian, and this is the second reason. The world is passing away. Reason number two, the world is passing away.

Now, verse 29, he says, this is what I mean. And just real quick aside, that phrase there is translated in chapter 15 as, I tell you this. So some see a link there. Paul says this in 26 to 28. Well, this is what I really mean. I'm talking about the end times. But the phrase could simply mean, I tell you this, brothers. So here's another reason. I tell you this, 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. Why? For the present form of this world is passing away. So at this point here, Paul is clearly thinking bigger picture than a local crisis. Paul wants the Corinthians once again to see the unseen, to view life in light of the eternal and spiritual realities that transcend, that supersede the physical earthly realities that can be seen with our eyes. Friends, Jesus Christ is alive, and he is reigning from on high, and he is soon coming again. And you know, when he does, this world in its present form will pass away. We even saw Isaiah predict this in chapter 51 in the fall. The earth, he says, will wear out like a garment. But my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

[19:27] And though God, God doesn't define time as we do, you know that, uh, he doesn't do that. But, but he says, he tells us the return of Christ is imminent. Surely I am coming soon, Jesus says in Revelation 22:20.

And he tells us that what we consider to be slow, like, well, it's been 2,000 years. Is that soon? What we consider to be slow is actually God's patience, allowing more people to turn to Christ and receive eternal life. If he had come before, we wouldn't be going to heaven with the Lord. He's tarried, letting more people come into the kingdom. But he is coming soon. He is coming soon. And he will come like a thief in the night on a day and an hour that we do not expect. And church, on that day, the only marriage that's going to matter is Jesus Christ wedding himself forevermore to his bride, the church. The church having been made spotless and ready in the beautiful garments of his righteousness. That's the ultimate wedding to come. And this is the perspective that Paul wants us to have as we consider marriage and singleness in all of life. Okay, so does this mean literally that we're supposed to live if we're married as if we're not married? Does this mean he's telling us to like stuff down our emotions, right? Whether joy or sorrow.

[20:54] Are we supposed to live like we don't even have worldly things? Like what is he saying here? Paul is speaking in hyperbole. I mean, he's already told spouses to remain, right? Be faithful in your marriages. So he's not telling them to literally live as if they were not married. Paul is urging Christians to view all of life primarily in light of eternity, in light of Christ's imminent return.

He's raising our eyes from the earthly realities that crowd our vision to eternal spiritual realities. See, the gospel doesn't eliminate our earthly responsibilities, doesn't eliminate our possessions, but it relativizes them. See, it clarifies our perspective to see their relative importance in light of eternity and in light of the brevity of this passing life. Our earthly marriages are not permanent. The sorrows

that we experience in this life will end. Our temporary joys even are eclipsed by the boundless eternal joy to come in glory. Our material possessions, they're going to burn. They will not last. They will be replaced by the things of heaven. Church, may we see all of life in light of eternity in Christ's imminent return. May we live with a fourth quarter urgency and focus on the things that are spiritual and eternal. Singles, I want to talk to you for a minute. We see once again in this text that singleness is good. Paul calls it good. It's not actually a lack as we so often view it. It's not a lack. It's actually a grace gift from God. And you are a gift to this church from God. Singles, prayerfully pursue a heart attitude that views your singleness in this way.

You know, as Jordan Leach once said in different words, it's not as if marrieds are on varsity and singles are on JV. No, no, no. All believers are on varsity. All believers. There are no second tier Christians.

[23 : 17] There is one body unified in Christ, gifted in different ways according to God's grace in order to build up the body. So prayerfully pursue this mindset that views your singleness as a good gift of God.

And prayerfully consider each and every day how you might steward your singleness in light of eternity, in light of Christ's imminent return to work for the things that are spiritual and eternal. How might the Lord use you in your present circumstances right now, right where you are, to work for the building up of his body and the advancement of the gospel and the glory of Christ?

Those who are married, we are reminded again that marriage is a good gift from the Lord as well. And Paul's counsel here is needed as we seek to live for Christ in the context of our marriages and families.

The first thing we need to remember here is that our marriages are not ultimate. They're not eternal. Christ is ultimate and Christ is eternal.

[24 : 28] And he did not join you, married people, he did not join you to your spouse for your temporary happiness, but for holiness and for discipleship and for his glory.

Are you, are we stewarding our marriages in light of eternity? Do we see our marriage and family as God's means to carry out the great commission?

Second, this, this text reminds us that we do have very real responsibilities within our marriages. You know, Paul is not at all advocating for an aloofness to our spouses or children.

And I want to especially speak to husbands here because I think this is more our struggle in general. He is calling us to faithfulness within our marriages, within our families, knowing that Christ is coming again.

So how are we stewarding this responsibility in light of eternity? You know, this fourth quarter mindset, this ought to be pressed into every single area of our lives.

[25 : 30] It affects how we view our jobs, how we view our houses, how we view our stuff, how we view our reputations, how we view our relationships, everything. This world is passing away and Christ is coming again.

So Lord, help us to live like this. You know, Paul then shifts to a third reason behind his counsel. Reason number three, God wants our undivided devotion.

Paul says, 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. Okay, again, what is going on here? Is Paul calling marriage worldly? Is he saying that singleness is more holy or spiritual than marriage?

[26 : 36] Also, what's with the use of the word anxiety? Like, I thought anxiety was always bad. These are all great questions that arise from this text.

I want to start with that second question first. What Paul shows us here is that there is actually a good kind of anxiety. You know, this word, it's the same word that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount when he tells his disciples not to be anxious.

But the word itself, it means to take thought or care, to be concerned with or preoccupied with. Now, certainly there are more negative things that often accompany anxiety, right?

Such as nervousness, such as panic. But to simply be concerned about something, to give it thought and care is not necessarily a bad thing.

Indeed, Paul is suggesting here that when the object of your anxiety is the Lord, the things of the Lord, this is a good thing.

[27 : 40] God wants us to be concerned about, to be preoccupied with him and his plans and his purposes for this world and for eternity. You know, we actually see this kind of concern modeled by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11, 28, when he talks about his anxiety for all the churches.

And this is why Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount to seek first. Have as your highest concern, your highest preoccupation. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Be concerned about heavenly things and not all these earthly things. Okay, the second question here. Is Paul calling singleness more holy or spiritual than marriage?

In short, I think no, not necessarily. But I think there are two realities in Paul's mind here. The first one is that very practically, again, Paul's grounded in reality here.

Very practically, the unmarried can devote more time and energy to seeking the Lord and to building up the church and to advancing the gospel. Take Paul as an example.

[28 : 50] Paul was single and he was able to devote his entire life to reaching the unreached with the gospel. Whereas those with spouses and children, Paul says their interests are divided.

Okay, so that's just on a very practical note. Now, secondly, Paul knows how prone we are to take good things from the Lord and misuse them.

Of course, we ought to please our spouses. That's what Paul argued for back in the first six verses of this chapter. But because of the fall, because of our corrupted nature that still is at war within us, these good desires often get distorted.

Right? Like how easily do we care too much about pleasing our spouses because we've turned marriage into an idol? Or how easily do we care not enough because we're selfish?

And then in both ways, we take something good and then we view it and we use it in a distorted way. And it becomes a distraction from pursuit of the Lord and from gospel work.

[29 : 57] Now, what God wants for believers, whether married or single, is to be anxious about the things of the Lord. How to please the Lord.

How to be holy, Paul says, in body and spirit. And in Paul's reckoning, this may very well be easier, he's saying, in a single rather than married state.

And yet, Paul says, 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.

Now, this gets us to the heart of Paul's counsel. He's not issuing a command here. Right? Whether to remain single, whether to be married. He's leaving room for Christian freedom.

Literally, he's saying here not to lay a noose on the Corinthians. But he's seeking their benefit, their advantage. How does his instruction benefit them? Well, first, because it promotes good order.

[30 : 53] Meaning, what is proper? What is appropriate? I think he means relationally and in society. But second, and more to the heart, it's because his instruction seeks after their undivided devotion to the Lord.

And that church, our undivided devotion to the Lord, is always a benefit for us. That's where our highest purpose is fulfilled.

That's where our highest joy is attained. In giving our undivided devotion to the Lord. This is what God is after. Our hearts.

This is what he's saying here. God is after our affection, our devotion, our worship, our love. And that's displayed through obedience to him. This is similar to what Paul said in verse 19 last week.

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. You know, we might even summarize verse 35 here as, For neither marriage counts for anything, nor singleness, but undivided devotion to the Lord.

[32 : 05] That's not God's word. That's just me here. Undivided devotion to the Lord. Short line, God is asking each of us this morning, Am I your highest and greatest treasure?

That's what he's asking us. Do I have all of your devotion? Singles, this text invites you to see your singleness as a gift and also an opportunity to, unencumbered by the worldly anxieties of marriage and family, devote yourselves wholeheartedly to the Lord.

This text invites you to reflect and to consider whether God has your heart this morning. Whether your primary concern is for the Lord, how to please the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit.

Married. This text invites us also to reflect and consider whether our spouse or children have assumed the place of first love in our hearts.

And you know, it also invites us to consider whether we are fanning the flames of our spouse's devotion to Christ or whether we are dousing that fire by distracting them.

[33 : 22] Are we a help or a hindrance to our spouse's devotion to Christ? And I'm asking you to consider for yourself, not for your spouse.

Don't answer that question for your spouse. Answer that question for you. Are you a help or a hindrance to your spouse's wholehearted devotion to Christ? And for everyone in this room, Jesus Christ ought to hold the place of first love in our hearts.

Highest treasure. This is why Jesus told his followers in Luke 14, 26. If anyone comes to me, he says, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Jesus is not saying to literally hate your family. So the language is similar to what Paul's doing here. It's hyperbolic language. He's not saying to actually hate your family. He's saying that our love for him should be so great, so high that our love for our family looks like hatred by comparison.

We love our families, but we love Christ all the more. Is Christ worthy of such a love? Is he worthy?

[34 : 43] That's right. Not only is he worthy, he's the one, the only one who even possesses this kind of love. Christ demonstrated his undivided devotion to the father, his relentless love and devotion to sinners like you and me, when he laid down his life upon the cross, that we might have eternal life, that we might have eternal joy in his name.

He is utterly worthy of our highest devotion and also saints. He empowers us by his spirit to manifest the same love, his same love and devotion in our daily lives.

That's the gospel. And this is our calling, whether you're married, whether you're single. This is our calling in the gospel. And so Paul now, having offered these three reasons for his counsel to those who have never married, he circles back to the original question and answer.

And this is the third part here. Question and answer reiterated. If anyone thinks, look at verse 36. 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, 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.

[36 : 11] So then he who marries his betrothed does well. And he who refrains from marriage will do even better. You should know, first of all, that these verses present another very big interpretive challenge.

They can either be taken as Paul offering counsel to the fathers of virgin daughters. Now, this is seen if you have the KJV, the New King James, the NASB. That's how they've taken this.

OK, so to the fathers of virgin daughters or Paul offering counsel, as the ESV puts it, to men who are engaged to be married. Now, the first option seems more ridiculous to us in our modern ears. But in the first century, this would have made a little bit more sense. Even still, I think, who am I? But I think the translation represented by the ESV seems to fit the context better, that Paul is speaking to men who are engaged to be married.

And he's bringing the argument that began in verse 25 to a close, rather than introducing a new situation. But either way, I want to say either way, whether it's the first or the second, the main point is the main point.

[37 : 22] Paul is advising that for some, it may be better, in light of the reasons that he's provided, to remain single. Though certainly, not indefinitely, if they're already bound to one another in betrothal.

OK, he's not saying just stay endlessly engaged. That's not what Paul's saying. If you're bound, he had said earlier, then stay bound to your wife. One who was engaged was basically considered a wife in the first century.

OK, so he's saying, for some, it's better to remain single. But for others, it may be better for them not to delay marriage. OK, for those who move forward with marriage, Paul is saying they do well. He says they do well to move forward with marriage. And for those who refrain from marriage, they will do even better. So Paul's already made clear why he thinks that singleness has its advantages over marriage.

Yet in the end, it's a matter of the heart. But whoever is firmly established in his heart has determined in his heart. All right.

[38 : 24] It's a matter of the heart. And at this, we're reminded that in matters of Christian freedom, when we're not bound by Scripture one way or the other, we ought to pray for wisdom.

Right. We ought to ask God to lead us by his spirit. We can and sometimes even ought to seek counsel from others, depending on the situation. And in the end, we need to make a decision according to the conviction of our hearts.

And when we're advising, when we're advising others in such matters, we should follow Paul's example and not bind one another's consciences. In light of this chapter, this may be true in the case of whether or not to marry.

Right. But this is also true in other matters of Christian freedom, like choice of public, private or homeschool, like choice of music, movies and shows and all sorts of other matters.

In which Scripture provides principles, but not prescription. Now, this area of Christian freedom, this is going to become the main topic in chapters eight through 10. So we're not going to say any more right now.

[39 : 31] Having addressed those who have never married, Paul then concludes his counsel on marriage and singleness with a word specifically to widows. It's the last couple of verses here to widows.

Singleness is good. Paul is saying. And so is marriage. Now, in these final verses, we not only see Paul's advice specifically to widows, but I think we see Paul succinctly applying all the principles of chapter seven to this one final situation.

So it's kind of like an everything. Here it goes into this one situation. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. So verse 39. Paul is answering the question.

Should widows remain single or pursue remarriage? And his answer is essentially the same at the most basic level as it was to those who have never married.

Paul says it's good to remain single, but it's okay to remarry. And just notice briefly how all the principles operative throughout chapter seven come into play here.

[40 : 49] Paul asserts, first of all, marriage is a lifetime commitment. Right. This is God's intent. But in the case of death of a husband, a woman is no longer bound by the law of marriage.

Right. She's free to remarry or to remain single. Both are viable, morally acceptable paths. And if she remarries, Paul says, she ought to marry a husband who also belongs to the Lord.

That's what in the Lord, I think he's saying right there, a husband who also belongs to the Lord. But if she remains single, in Paul's opinion, she will be happier. He says the word happier.

Now, this makes sense in light of all the reasons Paul's already given us for his preference for singleness. Right. The present distress that was going on. The near return of Christ. God's desire for undivided devotion to him.

So here we are at the end of a really difficult chapter of the Bible. First Corinthians seven. And this we've seen. This is some really needed counsel for marriage and singleness in all of life.

[41 : 51] If you're married, view your marriage as a gift from God and press in all the more to your marriage and family responsibilities. But with Christ as your first love.

And with his return ever in perspective. If you're single, see your singleness as a grace gift from the Lord. That you might devote yourself wholeheartedly to him.

And to the work of building up his church and advancing the gospel in light of eternity. And for all of us. Perhaps this passage would have us think twice.

Before saying something like this. Now I've said something like this many times before. And this passage was instructive for me. Man, you know, so and so is just so loving and so godly.

I can't believe they haven't been taken by now. Perhaps instead we should say something like this. What a gift so and so is to the body.

[42 : 51] How Christ like their example of love and godliness. May God continue to use them all the more for his glory. This is a perspective shifting kind of chapter.

I pray that the Lord shifts our perspective to be more in line with his word. May he lift our eyes to see the eternal and spiritual realities that transcend all the physical ones.

That crowd our vision. Church, Christ came. And Christ died. He purchased us with his blood. And Christ rose again.

Can't wait to celebrate that even more on Easter Sunday. Christ rose again. And he's coming again to restore all things. So in this brief, this brief in between, may we give ourselves in wholehearted devotion to him, no matter our status or station in life.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this difficult but good word that you have given to us. May you work it into our hearts all the more. God, as we go from here. We want to submit ourselves under the authority of you and your word.

[44 : 02] Not anything that mankind has to say. God, we trust you to do that work in our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.