

1 Corinthians 7:1-24 AM

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Date: 26 November 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Well, grab a seat. Good morning again. You know, that passage is just a little bit spicy, isn't it? Ryan, you want to take that on?

Yeah? Okay. Maybe next time. So the passage today, it addresses your married sex life. It talks about singleness, it talks about parenting, divorce, ethnicity, and culture through the lens of circumcision.

It talks about social class and work through the lens of slavery. But all of it is governed by this truth, that you don't have to change your circumstances to be changed by Christ.

So beneath our relationship status, beneath our resume, beneath our religiosity, is the true bedrock of our identity, which is our belonging to God, the one who made us.

In other words, it's not about who you are. It's about whose you are, who you belong to. So wherever you find yourself now, whatever you're facing, that's exactly the place where God is present and working in your life.

[1 : 1 0] I'll show you this from the passage, because you're all looking at me like, that's not what we heard about. So let's go to, if you open your Bible, go to the end of chapter 6, and let me show you where I'm getting this idea from.

So this was the end of our passage last week, and it says, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You are not your own.

You were bought with a price. And then if you flip over to the end of chapter 7, it ends with these words. You were bought with a price.

Do not become slaves to men. In whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. Okay, so everything that happens in our passage this morning is sandwiched between this reality of our belonging to God.

All of this is about God's claim on us. And these verses that I just read to you, they actually describe you as a house. They talk about you being God's house, a temple for the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 1 6] That's what you were made for. And you're in an expensive house. You're a Vancouver house. You're priceless. Two times it says you were bought with a price.

God paid dearly for you. You're valuable to him. And finally, you're not beyond his reach. So whatever condition you're in, you might be a teardown, you might be a reno, you might be new construction.

God can work in that situation. So I don't know, maybe you may not like the house metaphor. It might be too much of a pressure point for some of us. But now we're in it, so we're going to keep going.

So my first point is foundation. And this is talking about our new identity in Jesus. And my second point is renovation. And this is talking about how we embrace lives that are built on that identity of Jesus.

And it's going to get into some of those applications and details that Paul talks about. And my third point is inspection, which is taking what we've learned and looking at our own lives and thinking about what it means. So let's talk about foundation.

[3 : 2 0] So a few years ago, we looked out the window of our house. We looked across the street. And the builders across the street jacked up an entire house onto trusses, like 12 or 14 feet off the ground.

And they tore out the entire foundation. And they put a new foundation in it. And then they lowered the old wooden structure back onto it. And that's exactly what it means to be bought by God.

That all the sticks and stones of our identity, of our life, what we think of as ourself, now rest on this new foundation. They've been moved onto Christ. Our history, our ethnicity, our relationships, all

these things that we think of as being me, all of those things now belong on this incredible reality that God has bought us.

We belong to him. Bought is a word straight out of the slave market. Another word we use to describe this is redeemed. That is rescued from slavery, bought out of slavery.

And this is speaking to the fact that our life outside of Christ was slavery. It was slavery to sin leading to death. We were controlled by whatever the world said is valuable and virtuous.

[4 : 35] Sometimes we joke that houses are so expensive, they'll cost your firstborn. But here it's literally true that God gave his only son, Jesus, to buy our freedom.

We're so valuable to God that he paid in blood, the blood of his son. And it's as if Jesus came and splashed his blood across the oxygen block as he died.

And he freed us from death. And he bound us to his life and gave us to God. And, you know, I don't know. We looked across the street at this old house and we thought, why bother?

Just tear it down. Just start over. Maybe you've thought that about yourself. But to the owner, the house was valuable. And you're valuable to God as well.

Having spent his blood on you, he's not going to just blow away your entire life like a tsunami and get rid of everything. He is going to save you. And that means giving you this new foundation and beginning the slow work of transforming you.

[5 : 37] Your life, your work, your relationships, all of it into something beautiful. You are bought with God. You're built on Christ. You're filled by the Spirit. And it's your life that he's going to transform, not a different life.

The life you're in now, he's going to transform that one. And so God starts construction in the midst of our marriages, in our families, in our careers. And that's what this passage is talking about.

How that happens. So if you look towards the end of the passage, verse 17 says, And in verse 20, he says it again.

Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. And then he says it again in verse 24. So brothers and sisters, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. So this language of calling is about Jesus calling you to himself. It's about being claimed by God, being given this new foundation. Jesus calls all kinds of people with all kinds of different lives to himself.

[6 : 47] All ethnicities and cultures, married and single, people with good jobs and bad jobs, upper class, lower class. You don't have to have a certain kind of life or a certain kind of background for God to be able to buy you and work in you.

And whatever situation you find yourself in now through Jesus, you belong to God and the building is going to begin. So let's see how.

This is renovation. This is what God's going to do. Second point. So the first half of our reading, all that stuff that we find overwhelming and confusing, perhaps, this is just Paul applying this idea that we've been talking about.

He's applying it to marriage and singleness and divorce. And so right from the start, we see that the issue is that some of the Corinthians think they need to be a different person.

They think they need to live like an unmarried person, even within their marriage, in order to be holy, in order to be pleasing to God. And this is what verse 1 is talking about. It says, Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, and then he says the matters about which they wrote, namely, This is what you said to me, Paul says.

[7 : 58] It's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. So this is one of the things, there's several things that we'll see in the months to come. This is one of the things the Corinthians have written him, and now he's responding to it.

They're saying to Paul, We think that to live a good Christian life, maybe Christians should not be having sex at all, ever. And Paul says, Not quite. No, not quite.

God wants to work in your life, where you find yourself now. And if you're married, he wants you to act like a married person. He's going to transform you as a married person.

So that's the angle that we're approaching this. And I want to say from the start that this passage doesn't have everything there is. It doesn't say everything there is to say about marriage or singleness or divorce. Right?

He's replying to their questions. And he's trying to reorient their framework. So that we don't think we have to just kind of go out and find this completely different life or live a completely different way

to be transformed by Christ.

[8 : 55] That we're bought by him where we are, and he's going to transform us in it. Okay, so there are clearly a couple of surprises here for us, aren't there? So the first surprise might be how clearly, if you've been tracking with the series, how clearly the Corinthians don't all believe the same thing.

Right? So last week, chapter 6, it was all about way too much sexual behavior, ungoverned sexual behavior. So things like incest and prostitution and adultery have all been mentioned already in Corinthians.

But here we find out that there's this other group of people within the community that think completely differently. They don't think it doesn't matter, whatever I do with my body is fine. They think the answer to the spiritual life is to do away with sex completely.

And that's, I think, another surprise to us in our culture. This idea that sexual abstinence could be a virtue or could be a way to unlock the higher self, that's a really foreign idea to our culture.

But 2,000 years ago in Corinth, this was, it made complete sense to them. So in Roman culture, the purpose of marriage was procreation and the carrying on of the household.

[10 : 06] And it was all about duty, doing your duty. So seeking pleasure in marriage was thought to be a bit gross. It was a bit excessive. It was like, you know, that's not what you do. That relationship is just about procreation.

Pleasure is found at the brothels. It's not found at home. That's how the Romans thought about it. In Greek philosophy, there was a debate that was going on between philosophers. And some of them said, you know, are you better, philosopher, if you're married or if you're unmarried?

Because if you're married, maybe all these bodily desires are kind of clouding your mind and ruining your self-control. And those are things to be tamped down so that you can be reasonable and kind of rational all the time.

There were Jewish groups like the Essenes in the Dead Sea area. And they promoted complete sexual abstinence as a way to purify yourself before the end of all things.

And you may remember in Colossians, Paul says to false teachers there that were seeking this extreme kind of deprivation. They were saying things like, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

[11 : 07] And Paul is saying, no, that's not it at all. That's not it at all. So it's not surprising. That's some of the cultural background, right? It's not surprising that some in Corinth looked around and they took some of these ideas that they were seeing around them and they brought them into their Christian faith.

And this idea that sexual abstinence was a way to a higher path of wisdom or a better spirituality made complete sense to them, even though it's really foreign to us as an idea. So they're taking architectural inspiration from around them.

And they thought the truly spiritual person would be celibate. They would act like a single even while they're married. And it seems like perhaps some of them thought maybe divorce is actually the easiest way to accomplish this, especially if your partner is not on your spiritual journey with you.

They think to themselves, to change in Christ, I have to change my circumstances. But God doesn't call married people so that they can live as singles.

He calls them to be transformed in Christ within their marriages. And they're transformed as they obey what Scripture teaches, which is that in marriage, one man and one woman become one flesh.

[12 : 17] God designed sex for marriage. He designed marriage for sex. And this is what Paul goes on to talk about, verse 2. Because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have, and that's a very loaded have.

It means have intercourse with his own wife and each woman her own husband. And so when one partner withholds sex from the other, they're setting the stage for temptation.

That's what Paul says. They're setting the stage for temptation for sex outside the marriage covenant in the ways that some of the people around them were practicing it. And they bring on themselves all the harms that were described in chapter 6 by living that way.

So rather than pursuing celibacy within marriage, they're to give each other conjugal rights. Verse 3. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.

Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. That's just that. This is incredible. That's an incredible set of verses there.

[13:20] As Christians, we are not our own. We're bought with a price. We've covered that. But if you're married, you're doubly not your own. First, you belong to Christ.

Second, you belong to your spouse. One to whom you owe your very body. And so it turns out that a marriage is not like just two autonomous people that are consenting to live together like a business partnership for kind of as long as it works.

At the base of this is this mutual respect and self-giving and service, giving up my own rights for another person. And there's a transformation that happens as we serve each other in that way in marriage.

So in God's design, sex, this powerful, good, integral human thing is placed within the confines of marriage, where this pledge of faithfulness is played out in daily sacrifice, in the giving up of my rights for another person.

So how does a new foundation in Christ call us to think about marriage then? It's not how does this person serve or fulfill me.

[14:28] That's how we usually think about marriage culturally. How does this person, are they making me feel happy? This is a complete mindset shift, and it's only possible on a different foundation, right?

The mindset is, how do I serve and honor my spouse, including in your physical relationship? And this is why Paul says, as a concession, okay, if you have to take a break from sex, you can. That's what Paul is saying. Isn't that incredible? You can. Fine. If you agree upon it, and it's for prayer, and it's short. That's wild, isn't it? But he says, not too long, because it's going to lead to temptation.

And you need to live in faithfulness to Christ in the life that you have, which is a married life, and so live like married people. That's what he's saying. Many of us aren't married, though, right?

Some of us will never marry. Some of us will spend a season of our life unmarried, as young people, or if we're widowed. And if this is our life, God has called us to be celibate in those seasons.

[15:37] And this is what Paul is describing in verse 7. He says, it's a gift. It's a gift to some people, and not all people. So some are given the gift of marriage for a period of time.

Others have been given this gift of serving Christ singly and chastely. Paul himself has this calling, and he thinks it's wonderful. He wishes that everyone could have it. That's amazing as well, isn't it, to think about.

So it goes from this idea of mutual belonging and service in marriage to the call of singleness, which is this undivided service to Christ within the church and the world.

Singleness in Christ is an opportunity to pour yourself out completely in a way that you never could with a spouse or family. Later in chapter 7, he talks about how if you're married, there's always these concerns.

There's always these concerns with your husband or wife that you're worrying about. And he says, I don't have those concerns. I give everything that I have to serving Christ. So what's the takeaway here? Well, are you married?

[16:39] That's great. It's a gift. Allow God's grace to shine in your marriage and how you treat each other and how you think about your marriage. Serve each other. Are you single?

That's great. It's a gift. It allows God to shine his grace through your life in a way that someone that's married could never function. You can do things they could never do.

And neither should try to live a life that they haven't been given by God. There are no better or worse callings. So don't try to be single if you're married. Don't try to resist marriage if you should get married just because you think it's a higher calling, only to end up burning with passion.

That's what verse 9 is talking about. The life God has given you is his gift for right now, and he has a purpose for you in it. Now we turn to divorce.

It's in verses 10 and 11. And it's the very same principle that's at work here, actually, that the foundation we have in Christ controls how we think about divorce. And so it seems like maybe some Christians in Corinth were considering divorce.

[17:45] Because they thought that, you know, maybe I can pursue this celibacy thing through divorce, this path to higher spirituality. And so his charge to married Christians is to stay married.

And he says, this is not I but the Lord. In other words, in a time when there were no written gospels, he's saying, I'm actually quoting Jesus to you here. That's what Paul's saying.

God's intention is for lifelong marriage. Marriage is the union of two into one flesh, which is why divorce is so painful.

It's like being torn in two. Now, one of the tricky things about this passage in particular is that it's telling us to remain where we are, but it's not saying that we can never change.

And that's a bit of a wire that we have to walk through this passage. So it's not, this is not teaching us about divorce. Stay together no matter what.

[18 : 47] And we know that because Jesus himself gives us exceptions to lifelong marriage. Things like sexual immorality. Jesus says that could be a reason for divorce. We might want to add abuse as a reason.

Another exception he goes on to address is an unbelieving partner seeking divorce. And so the reality here is that as the gospel spreads, it doesn't always spread to entire families.

And so people in Corinth seem to be asking about being married to a non-Christian. Does this put the entire construction project at risk? Does a mixed marriage make a Christian unholy?

Are they being kind of dragged down by their spouse? And Paul says no. And that's what verses 12 to 16 are about. And here he qualifies a statement.

He says, I not the Lord. And it doesn't mean it doesn't have authority. What it means is that I've stopped quoting Jesus here. That was the part Jesus said. Now this is the part I'm saying. In other words, Jesus' teaching on divorce doesn't actually talk about this situation directly.

[19 : 49] And now Paul's going to explain it to us. So this is where we come back to the power of our foundation. As those that are bought by God. So rather than an unbeliever just kind of jeopardizing their Christian spouse.

The inverse is true. They're actually made holy by their marriage to a Christian. This is again kind of a mind-blowing idea.

It means that the power of Christ that works in that marriage is bringing the blessing of Christ himself. Who in a sense is entering that union and entering that household through the presence of one Christian.

Christ is in that marriage through the partner that is a Christian. Which is why in verse 14 the children are not unclean. They're able to be brought into the fellowship with the people of God.

Through their believing parent. So, if your unbelieving spouse agrees to stay married to you, good. That's great. God will use you as a sanctifying influence in their life.

[20 : 57] God wants to work and transform you where you are in that relationship. It's not a guarantee that they'll be saved. And if they want to leave you, you can let them go in peace.

Because we can't hold an unbeliever to Christ's teaching. But I think this is a really great encouragement to people that are married to unbelievers.

God's spirit will work in your family through your faith. This was what happened in my own family. I think my mom prayed for my dad for maybe 18 years before he became a Christian.

So, it happens. So, if you're married to a non-Christian, what should you do? Well, you remain. You serve them. You love them. You pray for them. That God might be gracious to them and call them to himself.

Well, we need to finish. So, let's think about inspection. This is our final point.

[21 : 55] And thinking about, so, this building project that God is doing in us. We're on this new foundation. I'm this kind of raggedy old building. What is God doing? What is God doing in me as I try to be faithful where I am?

And let's come back to the main idea. You don't have to change your circumstances to be changed by Christ. That's that repeated command in verses 17 to 24, right?

Remain with God in the condition you're called. Keep walking where you find yourself. And it's important to say that this isn't a prison. It's not saying your life can never change.

Slaves can seek their freedom. The single may end up getting married. The married may have their unbelieving spouse leave them. It's not a prison, this command. It's a promise.

It's a promise that wherever you find yourself now, whatever you're facing, that's exactly where God is present and working. And so, you can lean into it and trust him. You don't have to run around trying to change who you are.

[22 : 58] Trying to find a husband, find a wife, or trying to get rid of, you know. You don't have to change your life to be changed by Christ. You can embrace who you are as your foundation.

So, this week, I've spent some time inspecting the work of Christ in me as I've looked at this passage because this is very challenging, isn't it? To think, you know, I can't run out and find a solution.

I have to wait on Christ and be transformed. And so, these are some of the questions that I've been thinking about. And I'd invite you to think about some of these as well. So, I've been asking myself, do I actually see my deepest identity as being in Christ?

Do I actually see that Christ is my foundation? Or am I building my identity on other things? Am I seeking in the blueprint of my life to do what scripture lays out for me?

Or am I looking at the world around me for architectural inspiration for how I might build myself? Have I considered how in my life, in whatever situation I'm facing, that if it's difficult and it's terrible, it might actually be an opportunity for Christ's mission?

[24 : 15] That I might actually be in this situation to bless another person, to pray for another person, to serve another person. Am I considering the needs of others above my own?

And can I see how the life that God has given me is a gift? Our world preaches a gospel of restlessness.

Your best life is out there. Go and find it. Or maybe your best life is inside you. You have to figure it out and discover it. But our gospel is one of remaining in Christ.

That wherever we are and whatever we're facing, he remains our firm foundation. And so, we don't need to dream of greener grass. Perhaps, we can ask God to change us right where we are, in the very difficulties we face, perhaps by those difficulties in his providence.

There is immense love for us, because we're valuable to him. You are not your own. You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

[25 : 28] Amen. Amen. Amen.