

1 Corinthians 7:25-40 AM

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[0 : 0 0] Well, Happy New Year. My name's David Short and I thought I'd preach on a different passage this morning. No, let's go to 1 Corinthians chapter 7, page 956.

We dive right back halfway through this chapter from the Apostle Paul on sexuality, singleness, marriage and various other things.

And despite the fact that many people today look at Christian faith and what Christians believe about this as regressive and repressive and antiquated and even harmful, this is a truly revolutionary passage.

There's a Christian author and speaker by the name of Glenn Scrivener who's written a new book, prize-winning book, called *The Air We Breathe, How We All Came to Believe in Freedom, Kindness, Progress and Equality*.

And he points out there have been two sexual revolutions, not one. One, of course, is the one in the 1960s that came with the advent of the technology of contraception, where women were given the same sexual freedoms as men.

[1 : 2 1] However, as the freedom lever keeps being pushed and hit, it seems to have produced more unhappiness. And there's a growing number of feminists who are joining Louise Perry saying that the sexual revolution of the 1960s has been bad for women and for families and for children and for society.

But Scrivener argues the real sexual revolution erupted in the first century with the preaching and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus obliterated the double standards of his day, where men of privilege had unfettered control over the bodies of women.

Jesus says that men must share the same sexual restraints as women do. The gospel applies completely equally to men and women.

And the early Christians, as they lived out this new sexual ethic, created a sexual revolution, which was completely radical in those days and remains radical today.

[2 : 3 6] You can get a flavour of this in the early part of chapter 7 that Ben Roberts took us through sometime last year. In verses 3 and 4, the apostle says, The wife has authority over a husband's body, which would have been unbelievably radical then.

And the husband has authority over his wife's body, which is incredibly radical today. And this chapter played a key role in that revolution and continues to do so.

But what's so revolutionary is that at its deepest level, it's not really about sexuality or singleness or marriage. It is about the life-changing reality of Christ in us.

And then sexuality and singleness and all the circumstances in our life are applications of this fundamental lesson. Because in Corinth, what they're doing is they're taking, they've stopped building on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

And they've begun to build an illegal shed in their backyard on what the Corinthian view of sexuality was around about them. And what the apostle Paul is trying to do is he's trying to pick them up and put them back to build on the one foundation that will bring hope and change.

[4 : 0 1] And that is the foundation of Jesus Christ. See, most Corinthians took a kind of an opposite view of sex. Either they believed it was for unrestrained indulgence, or it's a dirty thing that you should avoid at all costs and focus on higher things.

One group idealised indulgence and the other group idealised abstinence. And both of these thinking and living ways had come into the church, baptised under the title of being super spiritual. Are you with me so far? We're not? Okay. I'm not going to go over that. That just explains, you see, chapters 5 and 6, which were about prostitution and incest and adultery.

They were dealing with the first group. But chapter 7 is dealing with the second. And there's a group in the church that thinks that singleness is spiritually superior.

Now, in most churches, we tend to idealise marriage. And we put pressure on the singles to marry as though they're somehow deficient, without having a life partner, which would make the Apostle Paul deficient and Jesus himself deficient.

[5 : 22] And I've asked a number of single people in the last couple of weeks, some of them inside the church and some of them outside the church, what they make of singleness. And here are some of the responses.

One particular woman said that she's just delighted. She loves being single because when she goes home, she doesn't have to cook for anyone and she can eat what she wants. I thought that was a very fine answer.

Her parents are trying to get her married off, but she said, I'm not lonely, I'm having a great time. One person said that they're confused. They say, why do all my married friends want me to marry as though there's something wrong with me?

Another said that they have found in their singleness a nearness and closeness to Jesus they did not have when they were married. What's remarkable about this chapter is the Apostle Paul says that Christ changes everything in our lives, particularly in the area of sexuality.

And the chapter is so full of love and grace to every single one of us, whether we're married or widowed or single, some who may be in circumstances that are just unbelievably difficult, that others would find hard to believe in the congregation.

[6 : 44] And Paul wants to woo us back to Christ for our joy and our happiness and for the life to come. And I've got two points.

There are two revolutionary changes, two things Jesus gives us. And the first is this, Jesus gives us himself. And if I had the light globe from Will, I'd go, ding, Jesus gives us himself.

And it's lovely and it's practical and it's just great to see how the Apostle comes at these issues. He doesn't come down on like a ton of bricks. He doesn't say, here are 1,000 commands, you naughty Corinthians.

He directs them to what's truly important and then he makes applications out of that. I mean, just cast your eye down the passage. You see, here he is an unmarried apostle.

In verse 28, he wants to spare them troubles. We're in verse 32, from anxieties. We're in verse 40.

[7 : 46] Here is a great verse. He wants to help them toward, you see in verse 40, what will make them truly happy. But the key verse in the whole chapter and the key verse to the revolution of Christianity and the one foundation for every single one of us is verse 35, if you look down at that with me.

I say this for your benefit, not to lay any restraint, not to put a noose around you, but to promote good honour and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Now, I want to just pause here. This word devotion, the word behind it, is impossibly rich. It's a combination of three words. It's literally, good sitting towards.

It's the picture of two people sitting toward each other, another person sitting in front of them and with them in the best way you can to attend to who they are and what they're saying and what they want and they attending to you as well.

And the word implies mutual serving and closeness, not just sitting beside each other, facing the same way, but facing each other toward each other, not just near someone, but attending them, attending to them with love and affection and devotion.

[9 : 20] And it's more than devotion because devotion is just a one-way street from us to them. But this word means this. It means practising the presence of Jesus.

It's cultivating the divine companionship with him. It's the daily, hourly dealing with Christ himself. And this is the foundation of our lives and the house that we will build.

And this is the source of any real change that can happen in us and the renovation. And this is the most vital thing to understand with regard to our sexuality. Do you remember back in chapter six, verse 13, Paul said, the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

But what is truly revolutionary is that this Jesus who gave himself for us and rose again is now united with us by faith. He promises to be with us.

And he draws us up into this ongoing communion where we sit together and grow together, attending on each other, so that every relationship and every circumstance in whatever we're doing, we're seeking him, we're giving ourselves to him, we're following him through everything we're doing.

[10 : 44] So you see, what ultimately matters is not whether you're single or whether you're married, but Christ, since we were made for him. In fact, the Bible teaches that at best, the best Christian marriage is a pale reflection of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

You remember when Jesus came, he called himself the divine bridegroom. And it's only as we receive the overflowing love, the abundance of his love for us and take it in day by day and week by week that we'll be able to face any of the real difficulties, the vexatious difficulties of singleness or marriage and sexuality.

And since Christ is our one true love, neither marriage nor singleness are intended as an end in themselves, but as different ways for us to sit well with Jesus.

That's why he can write with such beautiful realism. Look at verse 32. Let me read this. I'll draw you back at the second half of that verse. So the unmarried man's anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.

The married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife. His interests are, it's not divided, it's mixed. All he's saying is just don't be naive about marriage.

[12 : 06] Marriage is not the cure-all to problems. Yes, it can bring great delight, but it also brings demands and commitments and limitations, both for the man and for the woman. And the apostle is pro-marriage, but he says, if you marry, don't be consumed by the marriage or the cares or the anxieties of your family, which sometimes choke out the sitting well with Jesus.

And the reason it's so radical is that here he's speaking about the Lord of lords and the King of kings who emptied himself into the form of a baby. He lived for us and died for us for no other reason than because of his grace and his love and his desire.

And he knows you exactly as you are. He knows what you're thinking. He knows what you're experiencing. And yet he loves you and he loves me and he's never going to let us go.

And he sticks with us and he comes to us again and again and again and again. And that love that we receive from him can be reflected in our singleness and in our marriage and in our sexuality in a way that we can bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the deepest possible change that any human can experience. And I want to move to the second point but I have a bit of a postscript here.

[13 : 28] I want to make comment on the last two paragraphs of the chapter more for the sake of our small group leaders. If I can say relax at this point.

So firstly the second last paragraph verses 36 to 38. This is one of the most difficult passages in all of Paul to translate and I say this with regret.

Unfortunately our ESV translation is not very good. So it says if you look at 36 if anyone thinks he's not behaving properly toward his betrothed if his passions are strong and it has to be let him do as he wishes let him marry it is no sin.

Now if you read it like that it gives the impression that marriage is the solution to male sexual desires. And Paul's saying if your desire you're male man if your sexual desire is too strong go ahead and marry.

Now that's never the Bible view of marriage. Marriage was not created for male sexual release. and in verse 36 the word passions are not there in the Greek.

[14 : 39] The word literally means she is past marrying age. And the apostle is not speaking to single men at all. He's speaking to Christian fathers in the congregation who betrothed their daughters in marriage.

And the proof of that finally is in verse 38 where the word used to marry is not marry but to give away in marriage. So if anyone's still with me congratulations.

So what I've done is if you go online to Bible Hub you can look at some different versions and I want to commend the New American Standard Version.

Let me just read these verses to you because they make so much more sense. If any man this is thinking to a father thinks that he's acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter if she's past her youth and it must be so let him do it.

He wishes he doesn't sin let her marry but he who stands firm in his heart being under no constraint but has authority over his own will and has decided this in his own heart to keep his own virgin daughter he'll do well.

[15 : 47] So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. Bit different isn't it?

And I point out to you it's such a kind-hearted passage that this is what the gospel looks like in practice. It's going to do what's best for the father and for the daughter and for some bloke who has proposed marriage and for the community.

That's the first paragraph. Secondly the last paragraph verses 39 and 40 speak to widows and widowers and again we see the same kindness and compassion.

He doesn't command them to marry he doesn't command them to stay single though he says all things being equal it's probably better to stay single and the key is that if they marry again which he says you're free to do choose anyone you should marry only in the Lord which means likely a Christian believer which makes a lot of sense because if you marry someone who's not a believer it means you're building your life on a different foundation and you're going to build in two different directions so everyone who's relaxed come back in now I just remind you that the key point and the key to life is cultivating a growing relationship with Jesus Christ so along with giving us himself now Jesus brings a second change into our lives and here's the second thing and it is a change in time itself verses 26 to 31 stay with me so three times in this little section the apostle Paul mentions time and when he uses the word it's not normal sequential time one hour one day after the next but it's a unique kind of time full of meaning full of opportunity and hope it's a different quality of time not a different quantity of time so the first two references verse 26

I think that in view of the present distress or the present pressure it's good for a person to remain as they are are you bound to a wife don't seek to be free verse 29 this is what I mean brothers and sisters the appointed time has grown very short literally the appointed time has been compressed Paul is speaking about the time between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and his coming again and he's saying that the world in which you and I live and the history that we know is not going to continue as it is forever that there is an end of our world when Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead and to bring the new heavens and the new earth and he says that is going to affect every relationship and every circumstance in which you live because we live now that we are sitting well towards Jesus we live in this time like we are a pregnant mother waiting for the birth of our child we're hoping for the arrival of someone so what he means is this his picture here is this that the

[19 : 12] Lord Jesus has taken one end of history in the past with his death and resurrection and the other end by his coming again and he's compressing them he squeezed them together so that all who love him are caught up with Jesus and that means our days are now filled with hope and purpose and meaning if you're a believer we no longer live just one day after the next after the next but every day is an opportunity for us to live for Christ who has brought eternity into our lives and who's offered himself so that we sit well with him so what determines our days and what determines our identities ultimately are not whether we're single or married but whether we're growing to know Christ and our relationships and our sexuality we're not controlled or hypnotized by the world and what it offers but by him that's why

Paul is so free and easy with their circumstances in verses 27 he says if you're married don't leave it if you're single don't be desperate to get married if you're married or if you stay single there's no sin involved they're all good and then he comes to the third reference to time and I'm just going to finish with this little section in verse 31 he says the present form of this world is passing away it is now passing away it's not going to come a day and it'll pass away this world is now ongoingly passing away as Jesus brings the new heavens and the new earth the form the outward beautiful appearance of this world is right now passing away and that means we live as though not you see verse 29 this is what

I mean brothers and sisters the appointed time has grown compressed 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 for because the present form of this world is passing away what does he mean well he means there's something more important to us than all these things so when he says from now on let those of us who have

wives live as though they have none he's not saying ignore your wife or ignore your responsibilities your loving opportunities with your wife and family with I spoke about 10 verses ago he says but allow your relationship with Christ so to control your relationship with your spouse and your family that Christ will be glorified so human marriage he's saying is for this age it's a temporary thing when the new creation comes we will not be married to each other we'll only be married to Jesus Christ nor will we be given in marriage to anyone except Jesus Christ and our relationship is with him here and now because he is the true bridegroom and he stands at the end of history with his arms open beckoning us to come to him the one who laid down his life and paid the ultimate price for us so that we could be with us forever who watches over us every day who knows us as we are who's unchanging faithful steadfast and drawing us into his eternal wedding feast see so we live our true identity and our true life they don't even come from who you marry or our families they come from the Lord Jesus Christ no matter how wonderful your family is or verse 30 we live as those who mourn as though they are not mourning those rejoicing as though they're not rejoicing he's not saying don't weep and don't laugh I mean Paul weeps Jesus weeps but it means that laughter and tears are not the last word in this world that we know what it is to live with sorrow and joy together in the same experience at the same time and neither the sorrow nor the joy are unbearable which will make us unreal because we're building on the Lord Jesus Christ or 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it for the present form of this world is passing away he's not he's not a Buddhist he's not saying be detached from this world you know the world is an illusion and evil he's saying we need to live out a greater attachment to Jesus who died for us than anything else and this is what makes the Christian life so very different our lives are hidden with Christ in God and when Christ who is our life appears we will also appear with him in glory where we will sit well perfectly well with each other and with him as we see him face to face forever amen