

Redeeming Singleness from Misplaced Realities Part 2

1 Corinthians 6:9-7:40

1. **Positional Realities** – Washed and Waiting (1 Cor. 6:9-11)
The makeup of the church
IDENTITY in Christ.
2. **Sinful Realities** – Fleeing from what enslaves (1 Cor. 6:12-20).
Reasons to flee
Power & Purpose in Purity
God's desires trump ours
We are to seek to glorify Him, not ourselves
3. **Celibate Realities** – Celibacy and fulfillment (1 Cor. 7:1-6).
Goodness
Guardrails
Gift
4. **Settled Realities** – Content in Remaining (1 Cor. 7:17-24)
Source of Contentment
Secure in Identity
5. **Practical Realities** – **Advantages and Freedom** (1 Cor. 7:25-40)

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. ²⁶ I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, ³⁰ 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, 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. ³² I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. ³³ But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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.

Finally, Paul lists out advantages to singleness, where he gives reasons why he would desire others to be as he was: **single and celibate**.

Freedom from unique troubles (7:25-28)

A. General Distress

The first reason Paul gives to remaining single is based on the “**present distress**” that believers face in this world. He is not very specific as to what this distress is, but it is clear that the meaning of distress has the idea of “calamity, stress, or even the means by which calamity come”. There is a distress that every believer faces in this world. In general, this distress comes because of the world system that we live in, that is ruled by the Prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:1-3). When someone becomes a

Christian he is immediately set at odds with this world system, and is thus thrust into distress because they system is against him.

B. Specific Distress

Paul did, however, mention that the distress that is faced is in the **present** and had implications for why it would be good for one to remain single. We know that there was distress in the church at Corinth, and because of sin some were weak, ill and some had died (1 Cor. 11:30). We also know there was a coming persecution for the church, which would come in force within 10 years of Paul writing this letter. This persecution would mean that some would face torture, torment, loss of income/property, and even martyrdom. In light of this type of calamity, it would be that much more difficult to face the inevitable reality with a wife and family as opposed to simply a single person. Going through social turmoil would be less weighty if one only had to worry about himself and not a family that would be left behind after imprisonment or death.

C. The Pressure of Singleness

Paul expanded on the idea of present distress by talking about the **worldly troubles** in marriage. The idea of worldly trouble has the idea of "pressure" or "conflict", and Paul wanted to spare the church and make sure they understood this type of conflict. There is a type of pressure one who is single faces: loneliness, social stigma, feeling of being marginalized, and battle of identity are a few of the pressures faced. Even in the church, singles can *feel* like they do not belong, can *feel* out of place, or *feel* like **everyone** is married and happy. Paul's point here is not that married people face trouble and that singles do not, but he wanted each to understand and be aware of the unique pressure each faces, particularly married folks. That is why he again hammers the point home that based on the pressure around, if one is married, stay married. If you are single, stay single. If you are set and planned to get married, there is no sin you have to worry about to go through with it.

D. The Pressure in Marriage

However, Paul did not mince words when it comes to marriage. **Marriage does not bring a cessation of pressure or conflict, it BRINGS MORE.** There is a "pressing together" in marriage where two sinners are placed in close proximity for a prolonged period of time which results in a specific type of conflict. There are newfound expectations, demands, and responsibilities that a single person is free from that are true and good in marriage, but raise the level of potential conflict. Everyone of us has a certain level of expectation in our lives (whether we admit it or not) and when one enters into marriage with those expectations, pressure follows when they are not fulfilled. **Marriage DOES NOT cure loneliness, lust, or selfishness, and often those things are heightened within marriage.** Now, marriage also creates an opportunity for redeemable conflict, since we are able to be transformed by the gospel and forgive each other as God in Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32), but if we do not deal with it Biblically, the pressure gets to a point that will burst forth in anger, argument and bitterness.

It is good to remain as you are. if you are single, stay single. If you get married, you have not sinned, but must understand that the **grass is not greener on the other side.** If you believe marriage will fill voids in your heart or solve the longings of your heart, you will inevitably exchange one difficult reality with another. **Marriage is good, but it is not ultimate. Christ is.**

Awake to the way things really are (7:29-31)

Now Paul expands on his thought, what he meant by the pressure of worldly trouble and distress. What he focuses in on in the new **worldview of a transformed life**, the newfound perspective that not only changes the thinking of a Christian but literally how he lives. To be honest, at first glance these few verses seem either out of place or seem confusing by an interesting rhetorical usage. The basic issue is "be this or do that, but do it as though you were not that". But upon reflection and digging into these verses, we see the radical new way that a believer approaches not only **marriage and singleness, but all of life**.

First, we must understand verse 29 and 31 as two ends of the same point. He begins by saying the appointed time has grown short. The time of this world is fixed, meaning that there is an end and that end is known by God and is continually growing closer and closer. This is why life is described as a vapor (James 4:14) and like grass that grows and then withers away (1 Peter 1:24; Isa 40:6-8). He then concludes the section saying that the **present form of this world is passing away**. This world as it is, this manner of life, this mode of existence is destined to pass away, ushering in something new, different, and permanent. These bookended ideas form a new way of viewing life, not as **ultimate, but as momentary**, and sets out to define the way we live within it.

NOTE: It is interesting to note that those who do not know Christ in the world understand this same sense of life. The world philosophy will try to harness this ideal by the phrase *Carpe Diem* (or in a lesser way YOLO, or *life is short, play hard*), to seize the day and make the most of it. However, what they mean is that they want to suck up the marrow of life in a personal way, to live life to the fullest to satisfy SELF, to get or experience as much as they can, for themselves in this life. The **categorical** difference for a Christian is we understand the brevity of life, but we understand that life is not about us, but about the glory of God, making much of Him and enjoying Him. That is what drives these next five areas of discussion for Paul.

A. Perspective in marriage

"Those who have wives live as though they had none"

Paul's point here is not that a husband neglects his wife and does not participate in the marriage as a faithful husband. Actually, on the contrary he already talked about taking care of conjugal rights in marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-4), and he reminded the church at Thessalonica to take care of their homes first before outsiders, working hard with their hands, to take care of their own affairs, and to aspire to live quietly first (1 Thess. 4:11-12). Husbands and wives engage faithfully in all the things of marriage (budgeting, walks, grocery shopping, bringing kids around, cleaning the house, dates, vacations, etc), and this is not a sinful thing, but a God honoring thing.

However, there are two points here to remember as we "live as though we had none":

- Marriage does not excuse one from ministry outside of the marriage and the family. A wife and family take up the *primary* focus of our life, but not the *exclusive* focus of life. A married man and woman still have a role to play in the world (make disciples) and in the church (playing out the "one another's"). Being and doing things as a family is important but cannot be ultimate.
- The second, and more important issue, is that **marriage itself is not ultimate**. Marriage is momentary, and when death occurs, earthly marriage is over (since there is no marriage in the resurrection - Matt. 22:23-33). The marriage relationship is **secondary to the relationship we have with Christ**. This is why marriage is not the cure all for anything, but Christ is. If you are not content and joyful in Christ now, marriage will not fix that. In fact, our spouse should never become MORE DESIREABLE than Christ, and if they are, we are out of the purpose and intention of God's will. Our spouse should call, encourage, and admonish us to love Christ more than themselves. On the flipside of this, marriage should never be so disappointing that it diminishes

our love and joy in Christ. Marriage is temporary, and must be engaged in as understanding that it is not ultimate, but God's glory is.

B. Perspective in emotions

This also plays into our emotions in this world, with Paul highlighting two in particular:

- *[Let] those who mourn as though they were not mourning* - While on this earth, in this fallen world with sin, death, and pain, sorrow and tears are part of our experience. We mourn because we face loss: loss of loved ones, loss of health, loss of comfort. Even our Savior mourned the loss of friendship brought on by sin and death (John 11:35). When we love deeply, which we can do as believers, we mourn deeply because the loss hurts that much more. However, **our losses never incapacitate us**. We can mourn as those who have hope (1 Thess 4:13) knowing that though we are **losers** here, we will enter into a time and place with no more tears, no more death, no more pain, or mourning **because the former things have passed away** (Rev. 21:4).
- *[Let those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing* - On the other side of the emotional curve, Christians have a unique opportunity to rejoice in this world. We can find joy in the midst of turmoil or health (James 1:2, 5:13). We rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15), just as we weep with those who weep. We enjoy the good things of this world: good food, friendship, sunshine, companionship, competition, nature, victory, and a plan that comes together. However, none of these experiences is **ultimate joy for us**. Each of these joy giving experiences are foretaste's, shadows of the ultimate joy to come. This is why Paul's desire was to leave this earth, because to live is Christ but to die is *gain*, the gain being more of Christ (Phil. 1:21-23). We rejoice now, but not fully.

C. Perspective in possession

[Let] those who buy as though they had no goods...

We live in this world, and it means we engage life in this world. It means that Christians should keep doing business in this world, to continue to work, employ, save, buy, spend, refinance, invest, and evaluate market strategies for future yields. However, we do all of this knowing that our goods are not eternal, that these things will burn, and that they do not hold our hearts like Christ does. The Bible and Christianity is not opposed to business, but it always sees business as a means to a greater end, which is the glory of God. The questions that all of us should ask with goods: *Are all of my goods yielded to the Lordship of Christ, are my goods my greatest joy, and can I give them up if called to do so?* **Functioning financially in this world matters, but it is not ultimate**. It is necessary for our life now, but is here now so that we can show the world that though we engage, we are not beholden to it, since we are beheld by Christ.

D. Perspective in pleasure

[Let] those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it...

Closely tied with this thought is our dealings in this world, how we should engage, keep, and deal with the world. We engage with the world because we have been placed in this world. We shop for clothes, water our plants, learn instruments, work, fly kites, and wash our cars because we are living in this world. All of these things can be done without being wasteful or sinful. **However, these things do not gain our fullest attention or grab our greatest affection**. We use the world and engage in it without it gaining the fullness of our souls. The world is a means to a greater end, and that end is pursuing

Godward purposes, to His glory. That is why we engage and deal with it, but we know it is not ultimate, so we deal with it as though we had no dealings with it.

NOTE: This is Paul's point for singleness. The present world is passing away, and the time is short. Do not get caught up with or fixated on things that don't hold eternal sway. **Marriage is not ultimate, Christ is.** When Christ is our most precious commodity, when He brings the greatest joy, when we are satisfied and secure in our position and identity, we can hold everything else with a proper perspective. We can engage in a myriad of things, including marriage, knowing that none of those things is ultimate.

The time is growing short, so Paul commands that we are to live in a way that acknowledges and embraces the conditions we are living in: marriage, sorrow, rejoicing, buying, and doing business are all things everyone is involved in, but they are NOT ULTIMATE. We know that all of these, even marriage, are passing away for a permanent reality of a future kingdom and state with Christ. All of us, single, married, divorced, widowed, or unequally yoked are called to live with a greater reality, to cultivate our thinking around the fact that we are bought, owned, and live for Christ's glory, not our own. This is why we don't focus on teaching about marriage or singleness specifically all the time, because we ALL need to learn to follow Christ, to be satisfied in Him, and to glorify Him, and when we do, we live out our condition fully.

Freedom from (certain) anxieties (7:32-35)

The distraction of marriage

Paul moves on his discussion concerning marital status by finishing with the unmarried, or those who had never been married. He had already stated **3 reasons** why singleness was preferred, based on the **present distress, worldly troubles in marriage**, and the fact that the **present world is actually passing away**. Now he gives another reason to those who have never been married to strongly consider remaining single. Marriage not only brings trouble, it brings distraction. The nature of marriage is taking on an intimate, caring, and providing relationship with another. Paul's first statement in this section is his desire that singles (and everyone) would be **free from anxieties**, or literally distractions. A married person's life is thrown into constant tension of division. He gives the reason for tension for either spouse:

- **For married men** – the tension is distraction about worldly things, how to please his wife. A husband has been called to **care sacrificially, provide consistently, and serve unequivocally** out of a loving heart and mind to his wife. This means that he not only works hard to provide materially, but works hard to provide spiritual leadership in his wife's life. He leads by example, learns his wife, and seeks her best in all of life. Though each of these is good, honoring, and God pleasing (Eph. 5), his **interests are still divided**. The **tension** for a husband that seeks to please the Lord is the pull of loving both God and wife, and the **temptation** to love one more than the other, or neglect one over the other. This is a redeemable tension, but tension nonetheless.
- **For married women** – the tension for a married woman is about worldly things, how to please her husband. She has a role to **follow, support, help, and support** her husband as unto the Lord. A wife never gives up her personal identity or personality, but her role is to manage the home, including helping her husband and any children the Lord gives. This means a wife may work in and out of the home, and she is more precious than jewels to her husband (Prov. 31:10). However, her life is also divided in her pursuit of the Lord and pursuit of her husband, responsibilities, and children. The potential for anxiety and distraction is great, and thus the tension is great.

The clarity of singleness

Again, Paul makes it no secret and does not mince words when it comes to his desire for some to remain single as he was. Paul's life and purpose was crystal clear, and there was clarity and freedom for him in not taking a wife (though he had a clear right to do so – 1 Cor. 9:5). The clarity for singles is that there were less **external distractions** than a married person. There is a different **focus** that is available to a person that is not married, and he describes it this way:

- **Unmarried men** – they are **anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord**. This does not mean that a single man has no tension in his life, but it simply means he is not cumbered with the responsibilities or caring/pleasing a wife, but can devote his whole attention and affection on God alone.
- **Unmarried women** – her focus and attention is given to **please the Lord and how to be holy in body and spirit**. In other words, she has opportunity to devote her attention and affection to the Lord, and to pursue Him in order to be holy in all aspects: her mind, heart, and body. She can devote time and effort to study, prayer, and service in *unique ways* that those who are married cannot.

Finally, he pointed out that married couples have **unique anxieties** apart from those who are unmarried. Responsibility, sacrifice, pressure, giving up authority over our bodies, and seeking to please our spouse (especially when we do not feel like it) leave us uniquely anxious. One who is unmarried is freed up from these types of anxieties (yet, admittedly, have their own set of anxieties). The point that Paul drives at is clear: **we strive to promote good order, and secure UNDIVIDED DEVOTION TO THE LORD**. Notice this was not given just to singles, but to all of us. **Our goal in any and every condition of life is NOT to let the condition dominate, identify us, or become idolatrous**. In other words, all of us are to live singly, focused not on ourselves but on Christ who has purchased and freed us from our sin.

Some takeaways from this:

- **We do not find our identity in our conditions, but in Christ** - In other words, you are not seen as a "single Christian" here, but as a Christian who currently is unmarried. This matters in how we structure this church, as even shepherding groups are not designed around any reality except Christ!
- **Marriage and kids are highly valued, but not ultimate** - When we make something good into something ultimate, we make it an idol. Only Christ is ultimate, and only He can fill the voids in our heart. We can take marriage as the gift it was intended to be when we are satisfied in Him, and can thrive without marriage when we are satisfied in Him.
- **We must fight for the right expectations in life** - Unfulfilled expectations lead to disappointment, bitterness, and anger. The grass is not greener somewhere else. Answer this question. Which is easier (or better): being a man or woman? Submitting as unto the Lord or loving like Christ loved the church? Being married or being single? Be careful. Make sure you answer these Biblically. The answer is that neither is better, since all can glorify God in Christ, and all carry unique difficulties.
- **Don't believe the lie, expose it** - Do not believe that no one understands, or that your condition is so overly unique that you can't relate, or that somehow you are alone. Don't believe that a change in church (with a better group for me), change in condition (if only I was _____), or a change in ANYTHING external will fix, solve, or bring you ultimate happiness. Only Christ can do this.
- **Fight to cultivate your identity in Christ alone** - All aspects of my life: freedom, identity, contentment, and devotion are found in Christ, nothing else. This means we must cultivate

right thinking (from Scripture), so that we can live, love, and obey in whatever condition we find ourselves.

Concluding Questions:

- How do we encourage each other in the conditions where we find ourselves? What responsibilities do we have to those in other conditions (what responsibilities does a married couple have to a single person, divorced, widowed, etc)?
- What are areas have we thought wrongly about those in other conditions? Are there any areas we may have offended, hurt, or sinned against them?
- How do we secure undivided devotion to Christ in the stage/condition you are in right now?