

March 7th, 2021

How to Live as a Single Christian (or any Christian) in Transient Times

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

We live in transient times

Our message this morning is entitled “How to Live as a Single Christian (or any Christian) in Transient Times.” *Transient* means momentary, passing, not permanent, not lasting, not durable, fleeting. The Bible describes this age as a transient age. **2 Corinthians 4:18** “For the things that are seen are *transient*, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” Our passage this morning reinforces that idea in **v.31** “For the present form of this world *is passing away*.” We could multiply this truth out. **Psalms 102:25-27** Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. **Psalms 39:5-6** “O Lord...surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah Surely a man goes about as a shadow!” Nothing in this world is stable. The world and all its inhabitants are transient. That’s the truth you come to understand when you first become a Christian. This world is very soon coming to an end. King Jesus will return on the clouds with power and great glory, and will reconcile all things to Himself. All accounts will be settled. And all peoples, both the righteous and the wicked, will enter into their final irrevocable state. What is this age in comparison with that? Even if this age lasted for thousands more years, compared to eternity it would be less than a day. Certainly if we compare one day to a thousand years, we can see the proportion. But even if we compare thousands upon thousands of years to eternity, there is no proportion. Therefore at best this age is transient, it is a mere breath. It will disappear as quickly as it appeared, and all people will be in wonder of how brief and fleeting it was.

Paul offers help for this fleeting age

Therefore the apostle Paul desires that we would know how to live in this age. In our passage this morning, he is operating on two levels: the general and the specific. On a general level Paul is stating principles that apply to every Christian. On a specific level, Paul is applying them to single persons, specifically when they are considering their first marriage. Paul uses this approach in other places of Scripture. In **Romans 14** for example, he lays down several general principles: we are to welcome others as Christ welcomed us (v. 1),¹ we are to be fully convinced in our own mind (v.5), whatever does not come by faith is sin (v.23), etc; AND then Paul applies these general principles to the specific circumstances of a Christian's diet and holy days. That's what Paul is doing here. The specific circumstance Paul has in mind are single Christians, but the general principles apply to every Christians. This is Paul's genius method. In pointing us back to general principles, he's not just giving us Divinely inspired counsel, he's teaching us how to think God's thoughts after Him. Paul's entire aim here is to teach us to live lives in which the ultimate question, the ultimate consideration is this: How can I please the Lord? That is the happiest life a person could ever possibly live.

The Big Idea...

The way to navigate in transient times, in whatever condition you find yourself in, is to ask: "How can I *most* please the Lord?"

¹ cf. 15:7

- ☆How to Live in a Transient Crisis (v.25-28)
- ☆How to Live in a Transient World (v.29-31)
- ☆How to Live Free From Transient Anxieties (v.32-40)

I. How to Live in a Transient Crisis

The betrothed

Please look at v.25. “Now concerning *the betrothed*...” Remember that Paul is answering the questions they sent him in a letter. That’s how chapter 7 began. The betrothed were unmarried persons who were engaged. The question the Corinthians presumably asked was: “What should the unmarried, the virgins, and the betrothed do now that they are Christians?” As we said last time, conversion is the greatest change that any human being can ever undergo. It’s greater than one’s birth—it’s called the new birth (**John 3:3**); it greater than than this life because it is everlasting life (**John 5:24**). It is not to be compared to any other experience a human being has. And this monumental change comes with a question: how *now* shall I live?

The most trustworthy person in the world

Paul answers, halfway through v.25 “I have no command from the Lord, *but* I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.” Paul admits that what he is about to say toward the betrothed is not a command. He calls it his own *judgment* (here and in v.40); something that is *good* (v.26); something that is *for your own benefit* (v.35). Therefore to not take Paul’s counsel here is *not sin*, because this is not a Divinely inspired command. Nevertheless, it is Divinely inspired counsel. He says at the end of v.25 “...*but* I give my judgment as one *who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy*.” Single persons, before you make a life-changing decision to marry, Paul is the most trustworthy person you can listen to. Why? Because by the Lord’s mercy, He was made to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world. In other words, Paul's opinion here is not just one opinion in the sea of other opinions. His opinion is the best opinion. He wants

us to hear this, so he says it twice. Look at the end of v.40 “And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.” Meaning, he doesn’t speak as an ordinary Christian. He has been commissioned from Jesus Himself, given a special measure of the Holy Spirit, in order to deliver the very words of God.

Paul’s divinely inspired counsel

So what counsel does Paul give? v.26 “I think that in view of *the present distress* it is good for a person to remain as he is.” What was this *present distress* that the Corinthians faced? I think three options are most likely.² **First**, recall that Paul wrote this letter in the mid-first century approximately 52-55 A.D. Around that period there was a great famine reported by the ancient historians Pliny and Eusebius.³ Imagine how much a famine would have caused distress in the ancient world with no Amazon, no Walmart, no food pantries. **Secondly**, the present distress may have been persecution. Paul alludes to this in this very letter, 15:30 “Why are we in danger every hour?” He then says in v.32 that he had to fight “...with beasts at Ephesus.” All one has to do is look at the book of Acts. Wherever the gospel spread, those who spread it were persecuted. **Thirdly**, the present distress may have simply been Paul’s way of describing this whole age before the second coming. He described this time in **Galatians 1:4** as this “present evil age.” Certainly this age is a ever-present distress to Christians, since we taste the enmity from the world in rebellion against Christ (**Gen. 3:15**). So which distress was it? Paul doesn’t specify. But he’s does lay down a general principle that would apply to all three.

² A fourth possible distress could have been the fall of Jerusalem coming in 70 A.D. Jesus said of that time in **Luke 21:22-23** “...these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people.”

³ Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 335. During this time the city of Corinth appointed a curator appointed over the grain supply named Tiberius Claudius Dinippus.

1st Principle: In times of distress, don't change your marital status

So here's our **first principle**: *In times of great distress, it is good to not make any changes in your marital status.*⁴ He immediately applies this in v.27 "Are you bound to a wife? [Contextually, he's asking: 'are you currently engaged?'] Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife." In other words, stay in the condition you are in. Paul is exposing two temptations that we all face.

Our first temptation

First we are tempted to ignore what is happening in the world. Paul was looking at the world that he lived in, and he gave the Corinthians Divinely inspired counsel based off what he saw. If you are young single person, a temptation you face is to be oblivious to what is happening in the world today. The younger you are, the smaller your world is. Paul is telling you, 'don't think that what is happening in the world *won't affect you.*' You and I are a part of this world. We are not to be controlled or obsessed with the distresses that we see, for we belong to Christ and we know how this age will end. Yet we are not to be blind to what is going on. To summarize, if you are going to make a life-altering decision like marriage, it's vital to consider the present distress.

Our second temptation

The second temptation Paul exposes is the idea that *if* we just change our marital status, *then* we can find security or satisfaction. Beloved, marriage is not where we find ultimate security or satisfaction. Getting married will not solve your problems. In fact, Paul says the opposite! Especially in times of distress, our worldly troubles will only increase if we are married. Look at the end of v. 28 "Yet those who marry will have *worldly troubles*, and I would spare you that." Imagine if Paul were married during the distress that he faced. One author said

⁴ *ibid*, pg. 334

“...his suffering would have been magnified by his worry about his family and knowledge of their worry about him. They would have suffered every time he was beaten or stoned or imprisoned and would have been constantly fearful for his life. Who would have taken care of them in his absence? Who would have taught his children and comforted his wife?...Married believers who go through social turmoil and persecution cannot escape carrying a much heavier load than those who are single.”⁵

One only has to think of Pastor Wang Yi who is still imprisoned these past two years in China for simply preaching the gospel. How *must* his family be suffering. How *must* that be additional burden on theirs and his heart.

But it is no sin to marry

Now Paul is quick to say that it is not sin to get married *even in times* of great distress. Beginning of v.28 “But if you do marry, *you have not sinned*, and if a betrothed woman marries, *she has not sinned*.” Marriage is *not* a sin. It is one of God’s greatest gifts to humanity. The Lord gave us the gift of marriage because “it is not good [for] man to be alone” (**Genesis 2:18**); and because it—*more than anything else*—teaches us about the intimacy between Christ and the Church (**Ephesians 5:32**). The question here is: what is the *wisest* thing to do *during a crisis*? Paul’s Spirit-inspired counsel is: don’t change your marital status. Don’t seek to be released from your engagement, and don’t seek to get engaged. Wait until the distress is over before you make any decisions. Paul wants to spare you from additional worldly troubles. Isn’t the Bible wonderful? The perplexities that we often face in life aren’t between what is righteous and wicked, but rather between what is *good* and what is *better*. Paul is showing us what is better when we face great distresses. That’s our **first point**: single believers, when in a transient crisis, in order to avoid more worldly trouble, don’t change your marital status.

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 179-180

II. How to Live in a Transient World

Paul's new point

I believe v.29-31 represent a slight digression in Paul's thought. He breaks away from speaking directly to the betrothed and directly speaks to every Christian, and then returns to the betrothed in v.32. Because of this I don't think the ESV does the best job translating the beginning of v.29. It reads "This is what I mean, brothers..." giving the impression that he is expanding his thought about the present crisis. But Paul is not longer talking about the crisis. Rather he turns his attention to the transient nature of this present age. Therefore I think the NASB does a better job in v.29.⁶ It reads: "But this I say, brothers," indicating that he is transitioning to a new point.⁷

How the world thinks about this life

So what is the new point? v.29 "...the *appointed time* has grown very short..." *Now* it's clear from the end of v.31 that Paul is speaking about the fleeting and momentary nature of this present world. You see, he is teaching us that we must think about life entirely different from the way the world does. How does the world think about this life? An illustration from the life of Lot perfectly capture it. When the angels told Lot that God was going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, they told him to quickly gather his family and leave. Lot understood the fleeting nature of this life, but his son-in-laws didn't. When Lot pleaded with them to leave, they laughed—they thought he was joking (**Genesis 19:14**). You see this is how the natural man thinks about this age. He thinks it will never end, that it will keep on going as it always has. Peter captures their thinking in **2 Peter 3:4** "They will say, 'Where is the

⁶ cf. the KJV, NKJV, NLT, AMP. See Ciampa & Rosner's discussion of this on pg. 343

⁷ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 343

promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”⁸

God has not lost control

But Paul’s whole point here is that things *will not continue* like this indefinitely. Christ Jesus is even now bringing all things under his feet. You think what you see in the world today is God losing control? That’s entirely false. What you see today is God exercising *more* of His control, *more* of His authority, *more* of His dominion. What you see today is *judgment*. He’s doing precisely what He has spoken in His Word. He’s handing over nations and peoples over to a reprobate mind who refuse to love and honor Him (**Romans 1:21ff**). He’s gathering the weeds for the furnace (**Matthew 13:40**).

Paul’s urgency

Therefore Paul is absolutely urgent. Look halfway through **v.29**: “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*.” Stop. This is strange. What is he saying? Well he’s not telling us to abandon all our dealings with the world. He already spoke against that type of retreat mentality in **5:10**.⁹ He’s not telling husbands and wives to live as single people. He already said in **v.5** of this chapter that must not deprive each other.¹⁰ He’s not telling us to stop mourning *altogether*; or stop rejoicing *altogether*—Paul himself commands us to mourn with others in **Romans 12:15**, and to rejoice always in **Philippians 4:4**. He’s not

⁸ Jeremiah captured the same sentiment from those who didn’t believe the Lord in Jeremiah 5:12 “They have spoken falsely of the Lord and have said, ‘He will do nothing; no disaster will come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine.’” Also see Isaiah 5:18-19; Jeremiah 17:15; Ezekiel 12:22-27; Malachi 2:17; Luke 12:45

⁹ “...not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.”

¹⁰ “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

telling us to stop purchasing goods altogether, He commands us **Ephesians 4:28** to share those things with those in need. So then what is he saying? The last part of the verse interprets for us. Let me paraphrase: ‘We are to deal with the world *as though we had no dealings with it.*’ Meaning we are not to *do* things like the world does them.

Vanity Fair¹¹

Children, boys and girls, the easiest way to understand what Paul is saying here is to think about *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Christian left his hometown—the City of Destruction—to travel to the Celestial City. There was really only two types of people he came across in his journey: those who were traveled with him, and those who refused to travel. He came upon one town called Vanity Fair full of people who refused to travel. It really a fair, set up with all sorts of things to buy and sell. But it was called “Vanity” because the inhabitants of that town acted as if this was all their was to life: houses, lands, trades, honors, titles, pleasures, wives, husband, children, gold, silver, etc. You see the wicked Apollyon had set up the town right on the path to the Celestial City to lure travelers in to stop traveling. Apollyon used the things of this life to convince people this was all there was. Children, don’t you see how this is how much of the world acts today? Much of the world defines their lives by who they are married to, or how much money they have, or how successful and famous they are. But these are the very things that will very soon pass away.

2nd Principle: Because this world is passing, it cannot define us

That’s what Paul says at the end of v.31 “*For* the present form of this world is passing away.” The present *form* of this world. Form is the word σχῆμα schēma. The present form of this world is but an empty *scheme*, a vanity fair, a body without a soul, a shell without a kernel, and it is passing away like scenes in a play. One set of actors comes on stage only to be replaced by the next.

¹¹ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan Vol. 3*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 127ff

Therefor we arrive we arrive at our **second principle**: *Because this present world is passing away, we do not let it define who we are.* We are to keep traveling through, we don't set up our lodging in Vanity Fair and act as though this is our final home. "Well how do I know if the world is defining my existence?" What is your center? How do you finish this sentence? The purpose of my life is (fill in the blank). I will be happy and satisfied if only I (fill in the blank).¹² That exposes what your center is, what you are living for.

Keep your hearts for God alone

Paul has told us already the true center of a Christian's life. **6:20** "...for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." As the Puritan Thomas Goodwin once said: "You may use [the things of this world] as servants, not as friends, reserving and keeping your hearts [for] God alone."¹³ Even practically speaking it's utterly foolishness to rest your hearts on this things of this world. The Puritan Thomas Brooks observed:

"Some things have a beginning, but no ending, as the angels and the souls of men; some things have no beginning, and yet have an end, as the decrees of God in their final accomplishment; some thing have both a beginning and an ending, as [this terrestrial world]; but God hath neither beginning nor ending...Whatever

¹² What is the application for single persons, especially those who really desire to get married? Simply this: became how you think about marriage. Marriage is not the essence of your existence. Yes God created it because He is kind and generous and He loves us. But it is one of the things that is passing away. It's the false religion of Mormonism, not Christianity, that teaches that you can be married to your spouse for ever. But don't you see that this is a gross demotion of God? Jesus said that "...in the resurrection [we will] neither marry nor [be] given in marriage" (Matthew 22:30). Why? Because Christians will have a new spouse in Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ *Himself*.

¹³ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin Vol. 10*, (Lafayette, IN,: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2000), pg. 119

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Calvin "And those who used this world, as not using it to the full." Augustine: "We cannot love what is eternal unless we cease to love what is temporal." Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 348 & 349 respectively.

changes may pass upon the heavens and the earth, **yet God** will always remain..."¹⁴

Why is that skull on your desk?¹⁵

Have you ever seen those old paintings of medieval philosophers & theologians who had skulls on their desks? Here you have all these books and papers and candles, and then a human skull. Why? The skull was to remind them of how fleeting this life was. It was to remind them of their morality, that they too would soon pass away. It made them think about how they were spending their time and their energies. It made them ask the question: 'what is the center of my life?' Think about that. Perhaps you should go buy a skull. **v. 31** is Paul's skull on his desk. That's our **second point**. Because this world is fleeting and transient, we are not let our affections be dragged away with it, rather we are to do as our ancient fathers did: we are look forward to that city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.¹⁶

III. How to Live Free From Transient Anxieties

'I want you to be free from anxieties'¹⁷

Paul now returns to his thought about the betrothed. Please look at **v. 32-34** "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

¹⁴ Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), pg. 36

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.gracedupage.org/sermons/2017/3/26/why-is-that-skull-on-your-desk> Accessed March 6, 2021

¹⁶ Hebrews 11:10. We are to engage in the real business of life, 'setting our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth' (Colossians 3:2).

¹⁷ Paul now makes his final progression. In v.25-28 he gave practical advice, in v.29-31 he gave eschatological advice; not he climbs to the peak of the mountain and gives us Christological advice. Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 349

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.” Clearly *anxiety* is Paul’s focus here, mention it five times. Here the contrast is *not* between good and bad anxiety. All the anxiety that Paul mentions here is the good type of anxiety. Paul is using anxiety to mean *concern*. He’s saying that married people have earthy concerns that single people don’t have. Now these concerns that the married man and woman have towards each other are good and right. Paul said at the beginning of this chapter when marrieds please their spouse, they are worshipping the Lord. In fact, if marrieds neglect the duty they owe each other, they are failing to worship in that respect. But Paul is emphasizing that he prefers singleness precisely because it frees them to be completely set apart for the Lord.

Holy doesn’t mean more pure or spiritual

That’s what he means at the end of **v.34** when he says that the “... unmarried woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, *how to be holy in body and spirit.*” By *holy* he doesn’t mean that single people are more pure or more spiritual than married people. Celibacy is not a morally superior state.¹⁸ This is where Roman Catholicism and Buddhism has gotten it dead wrong by forcing their priests to take vows of celibacy. In fact, Paul says in **1 Tim. 4:1-2** that forbidding marriage is a doctrine of demons. Married people and single people have the potential to equally pure and spiritual before the Lord.¹⁹ By *holy* Paul means “set apart” or “consecrated,” (just like in **v.14**) meaning that the unmarried person is free from the obligations of marriage—he is not divided—and therefore has the *potential* to be *exclusively* used for the Lord’s work.

¹⁸ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 363

¹⁹ On the other hand, some single persons can be more impure and less spiritual than some married persons or vice versa. One’s marital status does not guarantee anything. Single persons have a great potential to waste their singleness.

Whatever will help you serve the Lord the best

Again Paul is quick to qualify his statement in v.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.” Paul is not putting a *restraint* upon unmarried persons. *Restraint* in the Greek is a figurative expression pointing to a noose or a trap by which a person is caught and held fast. Paul is not stopping unmarrieds from getting married. Rather, as the NLT puts it: “I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.”²⁰ John MacArthur says it like this:

“Marriage does not prevent great devotion to the Lord, and singleness does not guarantee it. But...it is easier for a single person to be singleminded in the things of the Lord. The married Christian has no choice. His interests *must* be divided. He cannot be faithful to the Lord if he is unfaithful to his family²¹...The single person, however does have a choice.”²²

‘Let them marry—it is no sin’

Paul then addresses a very particular situation beginning in v.36.²³ He says “If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if

²⁰ Luke 10:38-42 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

²¹ 1 Timothy 5:8 “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

²² MacArthur, pg. 184

²³ The older NASB (1977 & 1995 though not the 2020 version) and the ASV and the AMP have a different take on this translation. Essentially “But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*” as opposed to the ESV “If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed.” I’ve chosen not to take on this translation difference here. I think the ESV is probably right:) For arguments in favor of this position, see Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 355

his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry —it is no sin.” This not behaving properly might mean they are succumbing to sexual temptation. That seems to go with the idea that *his passions are strong*. But it might also mean that to hold off on the engagement would have been socially dishonorable. Betrothals in the ancient world, especially Jewish culture, are not like 21st century American engagements. They involved a legal contract, which required legal action to break (see **Matthew 1:19**). Ancient Rome wasn’t identical, however a betrothal could have involved legal benefits to the prospective husband, and an expectation that he would follow through on his promise once his fiancé reached the age of marriage.²⁴ Paul’s point is that under such circumstance —sexual temptation or a sense of moral obligation—then Paul says “...let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin.”

The one who has the gift of celibacy

But of course, not all who are engaged must get married. Singleness is still an option especially in a time of distress. Look at **v.37** “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.” Notice Paul gives two conditions here. First, Paul mentions at the beginning *and* the end of the verse “...whoever is firmly established in his heart” or at the end “...determined in his heart.” It’s the same idea as **Romans 14:5**, namely if someone is “fully convinced in their own mind.” On issues where the Lord doesn’t bind us with a command, the rule of Scripture is that we must have a fully persuaded mind, because whatever doesn’t come from faith is sin (**Romans 14:23**). The second thing that Paul mentions is he must be “under no necessity but having has his desire under control” meaning he is not burning with passion and he isn’t under compulsion by a moral obligation but is free to exercise his own will. In such cases, Paul says that man does well to not marry. The engagement could be broken off and the woman would be free to marry

²⁴ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 359. Perhaps what Paul means by “...and it has to be” in the middle of v.36.

another, or the engagement could be prolonged until a later time after the present crisis.

Personal choice vs. responsibility

In either of the two scenarios, Paul is leaving a genuine freedom for unmarried people to make a choice here. He makes that clear in **v.38** “So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.” His argument is not a question of sinning vs. not sinning. In this case it is a question of good (getting married) vs. better (staying single).

The permanence of marriage

He then reminds all unmarried persons that if they decide to get married that this is a permanent state. **v.39** “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives.” He says it like this because in Roman culture must like American culture, husbands and wives would leave each at their own discretion, the idea of no-fault divorce. But the Biblical command is that outside of adultery and abandonment, husbands and wives are bound for life.²⁵ Something unmarried people need to deeply consider before they say “I do.” He continues in **v.39** “But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” Upon death, the law of marriage²⁶ releases the surviving spouse and they can freely choose to remarry upon one condition: their new spouse must be “in the Lord”—meaning they must be a Christian. That’s how Paul uses that phrase in **Romans 16:11** when he gives his farewell greetings. He says “Greet those *in the Lord*” which was a parallel phrase to “Greet...*my fellow workers in Christ Jesus*” (**v.3**); “Greet also *the church*” (**v.5**); “Greet...*my beloved in the Lord*” (**v.8**);

²⁵ WCF 24.6 Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.

²⁶ Romans 7:2 “For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.”

“Greet...*our fellow worker in Christ*” (v.9) etc. The point is that Paul limits marriage, unequivocally to another Christian.²⁷ The WCF 24.3 puts it like this:

“...it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And therefore such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies.”

Why this limitation? Because to be unequally yoked in a marriage will necessarily to a lesser or greater degree pull one’s heart away from the Lord. This was how Israel largely apostatized in the OT because they intermarried with the world. Remember the lesson of King Solomon? 1 Kings 11:4 “For when Solomon was old *his wives turned away his heart after other gods*, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.” This is why Paul lays out this command, because it is vital above all things that our relationship with the Lord be protected.

She is happier

Finally, Paul concludes in v.40 “Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.” Paul’s last words on this subject emphasize one truth: he believe that to remain unmarried,

²⁷ WCF 24.3 It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And therefore such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies.

not for the sake of singleness *itself*, **but** for the sake of being more devoted to Christ *is the happiest life a person could live.*²⁸

Final principle: True happiness is found only in the Lord

So then let's consider carefully Paul's **final principle**: *Where is true happiness to be found? Only in devotion to the Lord.* The more able you are to be devoted to the Lord, to please Him, to be undistracted in serving Him, the more happier you will be, regardless of whether you are married or. So test yourselves: What are you really wanting out of this fleeting and momentary life? Do you want *wealth*? Do you want *pleasure*? Do you want *security*? You are lying if you say no. The real question is:

Do you want fleeting wealth or everlasting wealth?

Don't you know that God has hidden all the *wealth* in the universe in Jesus Christ? **Ephesians 2:7** "...so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Do you want fleeting pleasure or everlasting pleasure?

Don't you know that Lord has placed all the *pleasure* that can be conceived in the Son of God? So that 'no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him' (**1 Corinthians 2:9**).

Do you want fleeting security or everlasting security?

Don't you know that the only *secure* place in this universe is to be in Christ? **1 John 5:11-12** "...this is the testimony [of God], that [He] gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

²⁸ What is Paul aiming at here? His entire counsel is aimed at our maximum happiness. For those of who see happiness as a carnal and superficial thing, Paul disagrees. It is a false dichotomy to say that joy is spiritual and happiness is carnal. Both can be superficial (Luke 22:5 says "And they were *glad*, and agreed to give him money." Glad is the Greek word χαίρω *chairō* which is translated in other places "rejoiced" the verb form of joy. Clearly the Pharisees in this place had wicked and superficial joy over the betrayal of Jesus.)

They will make themselves wings

If you are here this morning and the purpose and aim of your life is not Jesus Christ, then dear friend you have no true wealth, no true pleasure, and no security. **Proverbs 23:5** says “Will you set your eyes upon that which is not? These things will certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.”²⁹ Your life is quickly running to it’s end. If you don’t have Jesus Christ, you have no true friend. Because at the last day you will be standing by yourself before God. Your parents and your friends will not be standing with you. Only one person can stand with you when this world has passed away: Jesus Christ, friend of sinners. Will you turn to Him today? Will you call on Him to have mercy on a sinner like you? He will receive you. The Scripture says “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”³⁰

Take this world and give me Jesus

Dear congregation, during the dark days of slavery in America, the negro spiritual was one of the powerful means by which the slave would fix his eyes on another world. Fredrick Douglas (1818–1895), the former slave wrote in his autobiography that those spirituals were “those simple...songs” that “breathed the prayers and complaint of souls suffering the most cruel anguish. Each voice was a witness against slavery and a prayer that God would deliver us from our chains. . . I often found myself in tears listening to them.”³¹ One such spiritual was the song “Give Me Jesus”

In the morning when I rise,
In the morning when I rise,
In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus.

²⁹ Paraphrase from the KJU

³⁰ Romans 10:9

³¹ Source: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/history-of-hymns-give-me-jesus> Accessed March 7, 2021

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus,
 You may have all this world,
 Give me Jesus.

~~Give me freedom~~ Give me Jesus

One scholar surmised that this song “could be a response to a common place tragedy like the brutal loss of children and other family and friends to the auction block. Persons in slavery, deprived and besieged in this life, might have nothing earthly to hold on to. But, if they were Christians, they believed they had an inheritance in God.”³² These precious brothers and sisters learned a truth that was more valuable than the world. They came to understand that “... without Christ all the luxuries the world could offer mean nothing.”³³ Those slaves didn’t sing: ‘Take this world and give me freedom’—though they prayed for it. No they sang: ‘Take this world and give me Jesus.’ Beloved is that your prayer?

When I’m happy hear me sing . . .
 Give me Jesus.
 When in sorrow hear me pray . . .
 Give me Jesus.
 When I’m dying hear me cry . . .
 Give me Jesus.
 When I’m rising hear me shout . . .
 Give me Jesus.
 When in heaven we will sing . . .
 Give me Jesus. Give me Jesus.
 You may have all the world,
 Give me Jesus.

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*