



Marriage and the Unmarried Christian, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

April 3, 2022

We have come to the final messages in our marriage series this morning and this evening we'll cover those. We're asking the question today: What does the Bible have to say to unmarried Christians? How should the unmarried think about marriage and their place in a church where marriages predominate. There are about 75% of the members of Grace Church that are married, which means, if you do the math, I think I've got this right, 25% of our members are unmarried. So, 25% of the church, our church anyway, is made up of unmarried Christians. About half of our unmarried folks have never been married before, and half of them have.

And of those who have been married before, that number is split, fairly evenly, between the divorced and the widowed. So that's Grace Church, 25% of the church consists of unmarried

Christians, which is no slight or insignificant number. These unmarried brothers and sisters, they, as I have gotten to know many of them, and have some of them in my own family.

But these unmarried brothers and sisters, they do have serious questions. Legitimate concerns. Many have godly desires and longings, which are, as yet, unmet, unfulfilled. In a dominant culture of a mostly married church, where 75% of the membership are married couples, many of them raising children, as well. That's not to make married people feel guilty about that. That's, everything is right about that. That so many people are married, raising children and all the rest. But still, it can feel, maybe, a little bit awkward. Or maybe, a bit, intimidating for unmarried folks to ask their questions. To have a forum for that. To know where and how to fit into the Church of Jesus Christ.

Married people can seem, to them, to be so busy. So preoccupied with life, marriage, family. Unmarried people don't know whether they can be a part of that. How they can take part. Where to

help. Whether they should ask whether to be a part at all. They don't know really where they fit.

Some married people contribute to their uneasiness, because they are so busy with family stuff and they leave very little time for unmarried brothers and sisters. Some married people are busy attending every birthday party for all the dozens of kids in the extended family, to whom they're related: nieces, nephews, cousins, second cousins, eighth cousins. Whatever it is, they're going to every birthday party on the planet, it seems.

Activity, busyness fills the schedule. Some families are so family focused that, when they move through the church, even, there are invisible walls around them and their families that sequester them and their families from everybody else. Intangible social barriers that are very real and hard to penetrate, around families.

I want to say very clearly here, today, that I don't see a lot of that at Grace Church, but I do see some. And, unfortunately,

I see some of that among us who ought to know better. And so, what I hope to do this morning is to provoke a mutual care and concern for one another. So that we grow in unity together as a church. So that 75 and 25 percents, they blend together. Wanna see us grow, as a church, in brotherly affection. Practicing the loving hospitality toward one another. Want to see all that grow.

And for unmarried Christians in particular, today, I want to provide some biblical counsel about living godly single life, in the context of a predominantly married church. That it doesn't require, I want, I want you to get the message, that it doesn't require you to change your status, from single to married, in order for you to have a full, fruitful, significant Christian life. I hope that comes across loud and clear. And where I want to start this morning is in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

So, if you've got your Bibles, go ahead and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. I'm going to make; this is the first point I'm going to make this morning. First point, if you want to write this down, number one: All unmarried Christians are

indispensable. All unmarried Christians are indispensable. Indispensable, that is, to the body of Christ. Indispensable to a healthy, thriving church.

As you'll find your way to 1 Corinthians 12. I'll direct you to verse 12 and let me start by saying this. It's been clear throughout this series, I hope, that marriage is a fundamental and essential institution of humanity. On the same day that God created Adam and Eve, he created the institute, he created an institution, as well, by joining Adam and Eve together, in a one flesh union, lifelong union, and he created there a marriage.

We said, earlier on, in our series, we said that an institution, here's the definition of it, It's a well-established and structured pattern of relationships. That's what marriage is, well established, structured pattern of relationship between a man and a woman. One man, one woman together in a one flesh union for life.

Marriage also is an institution because it is a fundamental part of culture. That's what marriage is. It is the first

institution, and as a fundamental institution, it is the, the bricks upon which all society are built. As marriages and as a fundamental institution, it is a formative institution, as well.

We mentioned this earlier in the series Yuval Levin, he said, is it this way that institutions, quote, "form our habits, our expectations, and ultimately our character. By giving shape to our experience of life in society. Institutions give shape to our place in the world and to our understanding of its contours. They are, at once, constraining and enabling. The means by which we're socialized, and so they are crucial intermediaries between our inner selves, our inner lives, and our social lives." End Quote.

That's what marriage is. That's what marriage does. It is a constraining institution and, at the same time, an enabling institution. It's an institution that restrains and constrains, in order, that it might form and shape, so that we can be of some earthly good to somebody. Left to ourselves, growing up in the wild, raised by a pack of wolves; not much help. We need families.

We need marriages, institutions. It's easy to see that, isn't it? How marriage is fundamental, essential, vital for any society, church society included. Marriage is vital. Healthy marriages work its way into healthy society. Bad, dysfunctional, sinful marriages, torn apart by sin, results in dysfunctional society, as well.

What about those, though, who are not, themselves, participating in this institution of marriage? What about those who are unmarried? Do they have a place in the church? Do they count for something or when they come into the church, we just count them as kind of half people? You know, put a couple of them together and they make a full person. It's not what Paul says.

Go ahead and look at 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 12. And Paul says this, "For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one spirit we were all



baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one spirit."

We see that truth, what Paul just said there, eloquently proclaimed in every single baptism service, don't we? The diversity in the body of Christ. So many different lives and stories and backgrounds and cultures and upbringings. All of those different stories. And yet, at the heart and soul of a church is a sameness. There is a sameness in the body of Christ. There's a unity in the same salvation, by the same gospel, about the same Lord Jesus Christ, in his perfect finished work on the cross. All accomplished by the same Holy Spirit. So Christian discipleship, Christian sanctification, it's essentially the same for every one of us, isn't it?

What's working in each one of us is the power of God by the spirit of God. Applying the word of God under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That's the same for all of us, no matter what the status is. We all gather to partick, to partake of the regular means of grace in the church regardless of marital status.

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Hearing God's word preached, affirming those new Christians being baptized, partaking together in the fellowship at the Lord's table. We're all equipped to do the work of the ministry regardless of marital status. We practice 'one another' commands of scripture, all in the context of the local church, and then when we leave here, go out from a Sunday morning's worship service. We're all responsible for the same things, as well, before the Lord.

We all love our neighbors as ourselves. We're all zealous for good works. We're always about the great commission, to make disciples of all the nations. We're evangelizing the lost. We're baptizing the converted. We're discipling the saints. Our lives, whether married or not, our lives set an example of gospel transformation. We show the fruit of regenerated life. Show the fruit of a renewed and renewing mind. So, that unbelievers, all unbelievers, see the difference in us.

Whether you are married or unmarried, no matter who you are, Jesus has the same message to everyone. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself," let her deny herself. Let him

take up his cross or her cross daily and let him or her follow me. That call to discipleship is to anyone. It is to everyone, no matter what gender, no matter what marital or socioeconomic status, no matter what age, rank, class. And to anyone who follows Jesus Christ in discipleship, who takes up that call, who answers that call, to deny self and take up the cross and follow him; no matter what status, situation, or condition in life the command is the same, isn't it? For all of us, love one another.

The command is to love one another, John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, so you also are to love one another." Same thing in John 15:12. Romans 12:10, Let ah, "love one another with brotherly affection." There's to be a warmth in our love. There's a decision to love. Agape love is about a decision, that we make, to do what's best for the other person that's receiving our love.

But we're to love one another, not just in a, in a decision of the will, but with deep affection for one another. In fact,

Romans 13:8, "Owe no one anything." No. No debtors among us except this debt: To love each other. Why? Because all God's commandments are summed up in this one word. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's all of us.

Galatians 5:13, "You were called to freedom brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Serve one another in love. That's what our freedom is for. That's what our freedom is for. It's not, so we can indulge ourselves more.

It's not, so we can seek and serve our pleasures. Serve our own self-interest. Our freedom is a freedom to serve one another in love, whether single or married. We have a freedom. And any freedom we have is to give to other people. So, your marital status, really, is neither a help to you nor a hindrance to you, in your Christian discipleship.

Your marital status, whether you're single or married, whether you're unmarried or, what if, for whatever reason, your status is neither a help nor hindrance to your discipleship, to your

contentment, to your gratitude, to your joy, to your maturity, to your holiness, your happiness, your confidence, your significance, meaning, your sanctification.

Sanctification, essentially, is the same for all. Your marital status, neither helps nor hinders you as a Christian, and neither helps nor hinders your practice of Christianity, and neither helps nor hinders your, your fruitfulness in the Christian life. Rather, your marital status, what it is, really, is the context which God has chosen for you, to live out your Christian faith.

So, if you're married or if you're not married, God has chosen that state of being for you. He's chosen that condition for you. Your condition in life with regard to marital status, it frames the specific and practical ways that you walk in obedience to the truth. So, though different, certainly different, one status is not better or worse than another, it's simply the context that God has chosen by his goodness and wisdom. Each of those statuses is good. That point is reinforced in the next two sections here in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and start in verse 14,

if you are tempted to think that your marital status diminishes your place in the body of Christ, you need to listen to these verses carefully.

If you think that your marital status, let's say you're not married. If you think that, that somehow diminishes your place in the body of Christ and hinders you, makes you less fruitful, less available, think again. If you think your married status, the fact that you're married, hinders you in your fruitfulness and effectiveness in the body of Christ, think again.

Look at verse 14, "For, the body does not consist of one member, but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the, 'where would be the sense of hearing?

"If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each

one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body." Such a richness in God's design for the body.

I mean, just look at your own body and see the different parts of your body. Talk to Gary Brotherton and ask him about the biology of your body, that you are. He's taught a class on this. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Look at all the arrangements of what God has done with your body. And if you can appreciate that, and appreciate that your eye can do what your hand cannot and vice versa. And you can see the, how everything is fitting and everything is appropriate, take that same knowledge, and apply it to the church, and realize, that all this richness of diversity is for the good of this body. So, if that's you. If you think that your marital status is a liability and a hindrance to your service to Christ.

And I, as I said, that could be true for those who are married, as well. Some think that marriage hinders their service to Christ. So busy, with things of the married life, that you just can't be involved. Well take note of verse 18. What does Paul

say? "As it is God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose." What is that telling us? God is sovereign. God is in control. He has chosen this for you. God has sovereignly ordained your place. Whatever it is.

So, if you are susceptible to the sin of discontentment. If you are susceptible and prone to grumbling about your lot in life. You need to memorize that verse. That needs to become your life verse. Meditate on those truths. Ask God to weave that verse into the fabric of your soul.

One status, or set of circumstances, is not better than another. Being married is not better than being unmarried, or vice versa. What really matters? Is holiness and gratitude and contentment and obedience to Christ. The pursuit of Christ likeness. That's what matters.

Now there are those, on the other hand, who can think far too highly of their status and think more highly of themselves, because of their status. And so, Paul addresses them starting in verse 20. "As it is, there are many parts and yet one body." And

so, verse 21, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"

I mean, think about, if that were true, in just a human body the, the head not caring for the feet. Well, that head isn't going to get anywhere without any feet attached, right? On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. That's the word for our point. All unmarried Christians are indispensable.

"And on those parts of the body, we think less honorable," but we, "we bestow the greater honor and our unpresentable parts are treated with the greater modesty, which our more presentable parts, do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor, to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together." Isn't that beautiful?

Again, the responsibility for the composition of the body of Christ, in all of its variety and diversity, all its various conditions, statuses, sets of circumstances, all of its gifts, all of its weaknesses, all of its strengths. Paul lays all that at the feet of God. The one who is sovereign and good and wise. The reason God has done what he has done. The reason he's composed the body this way. The reason he is arrange the parts and knit them together the way he has, verse 25, is so there is "no division in the body, but that the members have the same care for one another." So, Christian, married or unmarried Christian, does that verse resonate with you? Does that verse characterize you?

Unmarried Christians, do you have the same care for one another? Unmarried and married alike or are you subtly, in your heart, resenting your married brothers and sisters? Do you complain? In complaining about your own condition and your own circumstances, do you somehow despise them for being married? For having what, you feel like, has been withheld from you.

Whether you're single, divorced, widowed, do you envy those who are married? Do you have a hard time rejoicing with them in the birth of a child, for instance, or the birth of a grandchild? You ought not to. You have a hard time with those who seem to enjoy and rejoice in their marriages? Rejoice in their families. You have a hard time rejoicing with them drawing nearer to them. Serving them. Being a part of their life. Engaging with them.

Married Christians, let me pose some questions to you. Are you intentional in reaching out with the same care for others, married or unmarried? Do you treat them alike? Or are you somewhat preferential toward married people, because you kind of relate with them and kind of share life with them.

Those who have younger families. You just want to, you just want to keep everything in your own peer group because it's comfortable, because it's useful to you, in some way. Are you somewhat indifferent? Even maybe, even oblivious to others outside your marriage? Are you oblivious to those outside your own family? Are you so focused on your family that you exclude others? Or do the unmarried enjoy the warmth of your

hospitality? Do they have a place at your table? Are they on the guest list that you have for holidays or special meals? Do you invite them to that eighth cousin's birthday party.

Listen. This is how the institution of marriage has its formative shaping effect, not just on the individuals within the marriage or within the family, but how it spreads out to the entire society. This is how the institution of marriage shapes and effects all of society, when the married bring others into the home. When they give those people a seat at the table. When they share their fellowship. When they share their friendship.

The married and the unmarried showing mutual love and concern; mutually shaping and edifying one another. Listen, that'll change the world, one meal at a time. If there is any deeper need in our society right now, it is the need for friendship. In all of our social connections, people are starving for real intimacy.

This is what the church is. This is what the church provides. An intimate union and communion with Jesus Christ. Together, we

provide intimate union and communion with one another as well, and that doesn't have to do with marital status. It has to do with union in Christ.

When the ratio in our church is three to one, married to unmarried church members. We should have this covered, shouldn't we? So, if you're practicing 1 Corinthians 12:25 already, listen, praise God for you. Praise God for you. Excel still more, though. Teach others to follow your examples. Recruit, teach, model, and then, disciple others. Get them involved.

Now, having said that, wrapping up just that first point, that all unmarried Christians are indispensable, needed, necessary, essential personnel in the body of Christ. Let's turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Go back to a chapter that has so much to do with marriage and divorce, remarriage and troths, condition, and all the rest.

Let's consider a second point for this morning. We said all unmarried Christians are indispensable, but second, number two, some unmarried Christians are intentional. Some unmarried

Christians are intentional. I could broaden the point to include married Christians, as well. Some Christians are intentional. I could just say that, but I am focusing this sermon to the unmarried. The word intentional. What do I mean by that exactly? I mean intentional about living the Christian life. Living the Christian life, the life that you have received. The actual life you have received from the Lord. The lot in life that you've received from the Lord.

Are you intentional about living that? Or are you always looking across the, the backyard fence into somebody else's life and envying and desiring that, for yourself, instead of what God has given you. Are you intentional, in living whatever status you have from the Lord? Are you intentional about living whatever circumstances that you're in?

Being intentional about living the Christian life. Living the life that you receive from the Lord. This is a matter of wisdom that the church desperately needs to recover for our age, doesn't it? There's a key verse I'll give you. You should jot this one down, and you should actually commit it to memory.

Proverbs 17:24. Proverbs 17:24 says this, "The discerning sets his face toward wisdom, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth." "The discerning sets his face toward wisdom. The eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth."

There is a seemingly endless lists of options in our wealthy western world and that means that we are glutted with variety. We are driven to distraction and overwhelmed with choices. The prevailing tendency in our time is to keep ourselves open to all these different options. Don't want to commit? Wanna keep options open?

As the proverb says, we are always setting our eyes on the horizon. We're setting our eyes on the ends of the earth. But wisdom, and wisdom biblically speaking, wisdom is the application of biblical truth of daily life, taking revealed truth and putting it into practice and the resulting knowledge and understanding that comes out of that, is called wisdom.

So, wisdom, wisdom is biblical principle lived out. Wisdom means obedience to revealed truth. Wisdom is not about keeping our



minds open to all available options. Wisdom is not about always living in a state of indecision. Wisdom is about keeping our minds closed to everything that doesn't square with scripture. We're to be discerning and not let thoughts come in, that don't comport with Scripture. We're to close our minds to many things. That's wisdom.

But closing our minds, to that which doesn't comport with truth. It's about keeping our minds closed to what does not promote godliness, does not promote or encourage conformity to Christ. We are to live in wisdom. We are to live by intentional neglect. We are to neglect, turning our eyes away from all that turns our hearts from the truth, anything that would turn us away from what we know for certain, because it's revealed in God's word. We are not to entertain that.

We live in the intentional pursuit of holiness in the Christian life and that means, that we accept whatever status, whatever situation, circumstances, whatever is going on, we accept what God has chosen for us, according to his wise providence. We understand that, he is, whatever he's put into our day, whatever

he's put into our life, he's chosen that. That we should live in it, walk in it, persevere through it, serve him in it. We don't have to wait until it's all lifted in order to serve Christ. We serve Christ, now. Whether in want or in plenty.

So, some unmarried Christians are intentional. Some married Christians are intentional, too. But I'm giving attention, in this point, to the unmarried among us. I wish I could say the point, this way, all unmarried Christians are intentional. All Christians are intentional, but that's not been my observation.

Unmarried Christians can be intentional. They have the privilege to live intentional lives. Some do, some don't. Those who embrace whatever God gives them. Who live intentional lives. Embracing advantages of being unmarried. Man, these are the grateful, joyful, fruitful Christians among us. When you live an intentional life. When you embrace, whatever set of circumstances, trials, difficulties, status, whatever it is. When you accept that from the hand of a good, wise God; man, he makes you joyful, grateful, fruitful in all of it.

Now, in the first six chapters of 1 Corinthians. Paul has confronted and corrected various sins. Sins that had been reported to him. And as we get into the second half of the letter, Paul is answering questions that have come to him from the church. There's a literary marker that you can see. Actually in most translations, right there at the beginning of Chapter 7, it says, in verse 1, "now concerning," that's the marker. "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote." At marker, now concerning, that's a marker that we can follow all the way through the rest of the letter, because he's answering questions that have come up.

You can trace that marker through the rest of the letter. Down in verse 25, of the same chapter. 'Now concerning', verse, chapter eight verse one, chapter 12 verse 1, 16:1, 16:12, 'now concerning', 'now concerning', 'now concerning', and on and on it goes.

So, there are two of those kind of markers in this chapter. Verse one, verse 25, which means that, basically, Paul is addressing two questions, here, in this chapter, that the

Corinthians wrote to him about. The first question is this: Should we continue having conjugal relations in marriage, verse 1? Kind of a host of related questions to marriage and marital status. And then another question in verse 25. Basically, should engaged couples follow through and consummate their marriage? So, should married couples change things and should those who are anticipating marriage, should they wait, hold off, or go ahead with their marriage? Those are the two questions Corinthians wrote, to Paul, asking for pastoral advice.

Asking for pastoral wisdom on those questions. And we might want to ask the question. It's a good question to ask. Why would married couples wonder whether or not they should be engaged in something like that? In their God given gift of conjugal relations, why would they, why would they ask that question? Why would engaged couples question whether they should follow through on the marriage? I mean, if you're questioning that, shouldn't you just call it off?

So, why did they ask these questions? One of the interpretive keys to figuring out what prompted the questions in the first

place is figuring out what Paul means in verse 26 by this little term, the "present distress." If you identify that, in verse 26, that's the question. What is the present distress? What is Paul referring to there?

Bruce Winter, formerly of Tyndale House, Cambridge, he wrote extensively about the social situation, after Paul left the city of Corinth on his second missionary journey. Acts 18:18, talks about him ending that time in Corinth, after a year and a half a ministry there, and Bruce Winter has found a lot of evidence, of what happened after Paul left Corinth, which, actually, plays into some of the issues that we see covered in 1 Corinthians.

In this particular case, it was due to, there was due to a famine that afflicted the entire Roman Empire. There was a severe grain shortage that hit the city of Corinth. Corinth was a, really, a city of commerce, it was a bustling town. A bustling city, but the city relied on grain that was grown on the outskirts of the city. So, a bad crop not only affected the foods, the city's food supply, but it also affected the quotas that they needed to fulfill, in their obligations to the Roman

Empire. And if there was a famine throughout the Roman Empire and a crop shortage in Corinth, those two things didn't mix well at all.

There was pressure in coming from the empire and there was pressure even in the heart of the city, as well. Rome didn't care who had a bad crop. They needed to feed all those politicians, right? Grain shortages can create such an incredible social and political tension and in, locally, that could be turned into brutal violence in town, at the local level.

There's a poet by the name of Luken, who wrote this, "The grain supply provides the mainsprings of hatred and popularity. Hunger alone set cities free and reverence is purchased when rulers feed the lazy mob. A hungry population knows no fear." Seneca, also said this, "Hungry people do not listen to reason. Take away their food. Drive up gas prices. Hungry people don't listen to reason." Another writer said this, "Even the fear of famine, rather than famine itself was enough to send people on a rampage."

This is what was happening in Corinth shortly after Paul left the city in Acts 18:18. It was during Gallio's time as Proconsul in Achaia. Corinth was a part of the Achaian Province. But Gallio was the Proconsul, who was very eager, Acts chapter 18. He was very eager to avoid a riot in the city. Acts 18:12 to 17 describes that.

But there are inscriptions that have been discovered from Gallio's time as Proconsul, that commemorate a man, in Corinth, named Tiberius Claudius Dinapud, and this man was the curator of the grain supply. This man was responsible for the relieving of grain shortages in times of famines, and evidently, he rescued this city during this time. Three times. Three different occasions. It was through his wise management, that Corinth avoided the kind of rioting that leads to bloody revolt and the killing of leaders and all the rest. City elders were so grateful because this man was really responsible for saving their lives. So, they erected a monument in the man's honor, there in Corinth.

So, there's pressure from Rome, imperial pressure. There's a responsibility to provide food for hungry citizens, as well, locally. Threat of violence from angry mobs, rioting, that could break out at any time. All of this is happening when the Corinth, Corinthians wrote to Paul asking him these questions. So, it clarifies a bit of the historical background that explains the language Paul uses here. A reference here to, the present distress. This is the kind of social unrest that prompted the church to ask Paul some of these questions, that we find in the letter.

If you think about it, it wasn't that long ago for us that COVID-19 was an unknown thing and people were wondering about the immediate future. And we were asking these kinds of questions, about what's gonna happen. Is the world changing on us? You can imagine being a new creation, Christian living in Ukraine, and Russia shows up at your borders, tanks, troops, bombs, artillery. You're asking all those questions, as your people are dying and food and supplies are scarce.

By the way, I just saw an update from the Masters Academy International, saying that five brothers, five Christians died in Mariupol, the city that's been overtaken by the, by the Russians and they've been providing food and supplies and all the rest. They died, in just, in serving the people, that's some of the first Christian deaths over there, but they're, they're dying in service to others. Giving their life as a sacrifice.

We'll, maybe send out an update, by email, sometime later, but think about, if you're Ukrainian Christian right now. People are dying. Food supplies scarce. Four million plus, have left your country. You, too, would have questions about this being the right time to marry, start a family, raise children, engage in conjugal relations with a spouse, follow through with that engagement.

Especially, when the violence intensifies. Especially, when basic things like food, water, safety, shelter are uncertain. You'd wonder whether the Lord's return is imminent. Paul had to assure the Thessalonians of the same kind of things. They had heard rumors, as if they came from Paul, that the Lord had come,

in fact. So, it's not an unreasonable anxiety or an uncommon concern.

Some were wondering whether the normal practice of daily married life still mattered, in light of, in view of, the present distress. Now, that bit of background, we can extract several principles from this chapter and they instruct us really, on living an intentional Christian life. No matter what our marital status is. No matter what our situation. No matter our circumstances.

Here's the first principle. First, the principle of stability. The principle of stability. That is to say, no matter what is going on around you don't be prone to changing things. Don't be those associated with or those given to change. Don't be revolutionaries. Don't make that your first instinct, is to go grab your guns and revolt. Don't be prone to change.

Be stable Christians and this applies to the married and the unmarried alike. Be stable Christians. So, verses 1 to 5, husbands and wives are not to deprive one another in conjugal

relations. Don't change that. Keep practicing your marriage, for the sake of promoting holiness, in the stability of a healthy marriage.

Be stable Christians. Verses 6 to 9, Paul addresses, two kinds of unmarried Christians. He talks about the divorced and he talks about the widowed. Look at verse 6. He says, "Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am."

Notice how Paul here counts himself a member of this group, he's writing to. The prevailing view, says Paul was married, at some point in his life. He was, his wife died most likely before we meet him in the, on the pages of Scripture, the first time in Acts, but Paul was a widower. And Paul uses himself in his own situation as an example to those who have been previously married. To those who have been married before, he says to them, I know what you're going through. I know how it feels. I've

experienced both conditions, married and unmarried. Now unmarried, and I'm telling you, stay single. Stay single.

We'll get to his reasoning about that in just a moment, but let's keep on track with this for the moment. In verses 10 to 16, Paul addresses the married. He's, his message to the married, no matter if you've got a believing or unbelieving spouse, the message to the married is stay married, as far as it depends on you, as long as you have a spouse, stay married. Be stable. Don't make changes.

Same message, whether married, divorced, widowed, don't try to stay, ah, change your situation, be stable, be steadfast. Serve the Lord as an unmarried Christian or a married Christian. Stay stable. Paul repeats the principle three times in the next section. I'm just going to abbreviate it for the sake of time. But look at verse 17, he lays down the principle, "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches."

That is to say, I'm not just talking to you Corinthians, in your present distress. This is a rule that I pass out on all the churches that I minister to. Stay where you are. Be stable. Don't make changes. Circumcised or uncircumcised, don't try to change a thing. Serve the Lord the way you are, where you are, in the situation you're in. Verse 20, again, he repeats the same principle. "Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called." Then he applies the principle to social statuses, "slave or freed man." If you can gain your freedom, though, verse 21, hey, avail yourself of the opportunity. But, ultimately, social status, slave or free, neither helps nor hinders your spiritual service to God in Christ.

He comes back a third time, verse 24, "so, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God." What's the point? Why all this repetition about stability? About not changing? We have, don't we, such a natural tendency to think that these external factors matter? Social status, financial status, work situation, marital status, we believe those things what, that matter way too much; way more than they actually do in our service to Christ.

But listen, none of those external factors matter in the final analysis. Not in the ultimate sense. You can serve God, as a Christian just as effectively in one as in the other. In fact, Paul was very effective in his ministry, his service to God in Christ. As an unmarried man chained to Roman guards, sitting and languishing in a prison. A revival broke out.

Listen, God can do anything. Do not limit God because of your, your own limitations. Judging by things your eyes can see. By, by what your sentiment or you're feeling drifts toward. Don't limit God by that. Married or unmarried, listen, embrace the life God has given you. Learn to live by this principle of stability. Don't let yourself be unsettled. Don't let your hearts be ill at ease. Don't always try to change things. Believing that a change of status improves your sanctification, it doesn't. At the heart of this principle, is stability.

Write down the word contentment. Contentment. Are you content with God and God alone? Are you content with the Lord? Are you content with what he has given and are you content with what he has withheld? Are you content with his timing? Are you content

with where he's brought you in life? Are you content about the working, outworking of his providence in your life and your family and your situation?

Are you content? When you long for what he has not given. When you pine for what he has withheld, you fail to enjoy what he has actually given you. You turn your eyes away from his many kindnesses, and you become ungrateful and resentful and bitter. Your hearts drift into complaining and grumbling, accusing God, as it were, of injustice.

You entertain lying thoughts about his character. You turn your eyes away from all the actual things that he's done for you. All the signs of his kindness and goodness and faithfulness and love for you. Thereby robbing your own soul of its contentment and gratitude and joy. Ah, Christian, don't do that.

Don't do that. Pursue stability. Cultivate faithfulness. Psalm 37 says this, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness." That is be stable. Stay put. Do the same godly disciplines every single day. Do it every day for a

long period of time. You know what comes out of that? God brings fruit. God blesses.

"Delight yourself in the Lord, he'll give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust also in him, he will do it. He'll bring forth your righteousness as the light, your judgment as the noon day. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." Beloved, do that. Be stable Christians.

Be discerning Christians, Proverbs 17:24. "Set your face toward wisdom." Be stable, intentional Christians. Now Paul turns to a second question. As I said, in verse 25, about Christians anticipating marriage. Those are the betrothed that was the kind of social situation in Paul's day. We would say these are those who are engaged to be married.

But betrothal, in their day, was kind of a very much strengthened version of engagement. Or maybe a weakened version of marriage. But betrothal was a strong, binding, legally binding, socially binding institution. It's temporary. It was leading toward the consummation in marriage.

But these are folks here, in verse 25, that being asked about here. These are folks that are single. These are folks that have never been married. He says, in verse 25, "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." Yeah, and "I think that in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is."

Again, Paul repeats the principle of stability. Before answering the question in full, he repeats the principles of stability. "Are you bound to a wife? Don't seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Don't seek a wife. But if you marry, you've not sinned and if a betrothed woman marries, she's not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that."

You see that the principle of stability is not this rigid, inflexible rule that means you sin, if you pursue any change in your life. There is a kind of discontentment that God produces. The desire for a wife. A desire for a husband. God can be doing

that. A desire for a job change. A desire for future, further education. A desire for development. A desire for building a business. These are, maybe, some discontentment's that God stirs up and puts on the heart.

And, so, it's not always wrong to change. That's not the point. It's a principle. It's often the case in giving counsel, isn't it? When you give people principles for living. Wisdom understands that principles are just that, their principles, their axioms, their general guidelines, that give us a reliable framework for life. And when applied, when adhered to these principles, they bring blessing.

Was going to see Paul's flexibility in a third point, but for now he just wants us to give, to give more reasons that single people should consider staying single. And, so, he goes on to another principle here. Second, a principle of theology. A principle of theology in verses 29 to 31, talked about the principle of stability and now the principle of theology.

Verse 29, "Those who marry," or verse 28, "those who marry will have worldly troubles and I would spare you from that." This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. Perhaps a better way to translate that is, the appointed time has been shortened or is limited. The verb that he uses there, means to place something together and to draw it together.

So, maybe, picture in your mind's eye and your imagination, picture like a draw string and God is the one pulling the strings and closing the present time. So, the present time is steadily drawing to close. It has an end. Paul is not here fueling speculation about the second coming. He's not asking people to interpret the headlines and think, is the rapture coming soon. He's not saying that. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Here, what he's doing is, he's calming fears. He's settling nerves. He's reminding the Corinthian Christians about this fundamental principle of theology. That is, who is God? God is the sovereign of the universe. His Providence rules all things and has worked out in all things. God is in firm control of the

timetable. He slowly pulls the drawstrings of time. He's in control of it.

How should that affect us? How should that inform the way we live? Verse 30, "From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and let those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as if they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as, as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away." In other words, beloved, don't get so caught up in the world.

Don't get caught up in the things of the world. Don't be preoccupied all the time by the politics of the world, the concerns of the world. Don't let the politics trouble you. Don't let the social and cultural changes in our land trouble and upset you. Jesus said it this way, "Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead."

Why? Why does he say that? Is he cold? Is he callous to human suffering? No, that's not what he's saying. He just knows that God

is steadily drawing the appointed time to its inevitable end. He's bringing all things to its predetermined conclusion, so trust him. Paul tells them to look beyond their present distress. Whatever that is. Realize that God has it all under control. God has fixed the period or era of these last days and everything is under his firm control. It's moving history along its chosen path. Along its trajectory to reach its inevitable eschaton. Its conclusion.

Therefore, live the life that God has given you right now. You're just, you're just like a weed that grows very quickly, flowers, withers and dies, and you're gone and its place in the dirt, remembers it no more. Another way of saying, very poetically, get over yourself. Live the life God is giving you now. Make wise decisions based on what God will certainly do. Based on what God has actually revealed. Rather than what you're worried might happen in the future. But you don't know. How does this apply to marriage? Look, hold on to this world, loosely.

Don't squeeze and hold on to life with a death grip. Either grasping, what seems so very important or holding on, afraid to

let go, as if you're going to suffer immeasurable loss. Don't rush to prefer the married state or the unmarried state. Don't rush to anything except to a calm, daily, steady, informed obedience to Jesus Christ. Live intentional Christian lives. But in times of distress, especially in times of distress.

It is true that marriage brings upon a person more challenge, more complexity, and that helps us to appreciate a third principle. Third, the principle of simplicity. The principle of simplicity, versus 32 to 35. Paul says, "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife. His interests are divided."

"The unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord about how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. 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."

What's he saying here is, this is a contrast, right? It's not a contrast, though, between better or worse, it's a contrast between simple and complex. Being married, more complex, being single, much simpler. Can I get an Amen? Can I get a witness? It's, it's hard to convince. Isn't it? It's hard to convince those who are longing for marriage about this principle of simplicity. Married people warn single people about this all the time, and they just seem unable to hear it.

One commentator said, "Marriage brings trouble in the flesh. It is not a romantic haven from the problems of the world." Here, Paul, would perhaps share the attitude of the rabbi who said, "A young man is like that colt that whinnies. He paces up and down. He grooms himself with care. This is because he's looking for a wife, but once married he resembles a donkey quite loaded down with burdens."

When I read 1 Corinthians 7 and this text, in particular, as a single man. I wasn't convinced to remain single either. I was like that young colt, bucking in the stall. So, hey, I get this

single people. I get it. Today I'm that dumb old donkey. And I'm growing more and more stubborn by the day, more donkey like, and marriage is a blessed gift.

Marriage is a blessed gift for those to whom it's been given. He who finds a wife, finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord. But for all who hear the message of beautiful simplicity, in verse 35, that single life promotes good order, that secures undivided devotion to the Lord, man, the Lord may use that to guide some of you to accept your singleness as a gift: No matter if that is a temporary gift or a lifetime gift. When you're unmarried or single and single-minded in your devotion to the Lord, you have the blessing of simplicity in life.

And that brings with it the blessing of an undistracted worship. Of deep study. Of slow meditative thinking, without kids tugging on your, on your pants and pant leg and all the rest. I love kids. I love my kids. I love it is such a wonderful thing, but listen, there is something beautiful about the simplicity

without the distraction. You can study and think and meditate and pray and plan in an unhurried, undistracted environment.

You can pursue the lines. All those lines of biblical theological investigation, that you love to pursue in ways, that make married people green with envy. Go ahead, rejoice in it. Enjoy it. It's your gift.

When you're unmarried and you're single-minded in your devotions of the Lord, listen, you have the blessing of simplicity, of focusing your time and your energy. You have a simplicity in your stewardship, of how you're going to use time, energy, resource. You have flexibility, and time, and serving. You have flexibility in showing, hospitality, and enjoying hospitality, as well. You have the simplicity of a life that has allowed you the flexibility to engage in all kinds of discipleship relationships. Conforming to different situations and moving back and forth with ease. Varying times. Varying places of discipleship. You're not tied down. You can move at the drop of a hat.

Now, that sounds attractive to every single one of us. Even to some of Jesus own disciples, who, they were realizing the weight of responsibility of the married life, when Jesus was teaching about the permanence of marriage. And they said, listen, if such is the case of a man with his wife, it's better not to marry. Jesus answered, not saying, oh no, no, no, no, no, don't, don't think like that. Don't go overboard. No, he said. He said, listen, not everyone can receive this saying. But only those to whom it is given. It's a gift. So, a lifetime of singleness, that, too, is a gift from the Lord, even as marriage is a gift.

Jesus went on, in that context, Matthew 19, to describe the reasons for singleness. Reason to people that may have a lifetime of singleness. Some who are physically unable to marry, have that gift. Whether that's from birth, or whether it's due to the sin of others perpetrated upon them. Others forgo marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus said at the end of that section, he said, "let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

If you're able, receive it, take it up. Paul is one of those who received that saying. He received that saying. God enabled him to do that. And he recommends, commends the married, unmarried life. He commends it as worth considering. Now all that is fine and good, right? But the guy from verse 25 is still waiting there for an answer. It's like, yeah but, but what do I do?

So, we've gone through all this stuff and it brings us to a third Point. Number three, some unmarried Christians are eligible. Some unmarried Christians are eligible. By eligible I mean of course eligible to marry. So, this refers to those who've never been married, but who want to be married.

Refers of those whose, maybe those whose divorce is biblically sanctioned, that is conducted under the purview of the local church, under the oversight of its leadership, and it's, actually, biblically justified and so they're free to remarry. Also refers to the widows, as well, even though Paul does not recommend it for the unmarried or for the widows to get remarried. And yet they have a freedom.

So back to the man in verse 25, he'd asked, what about me and my fiancée? What about us waiting for the consummation of our marriage? What am I supposed to do with her? We notice, as I went through the last point, that Paul postponed the answer of that question until he laid down some instruction about living an intentional life with principles of stability and theology and simplicity.

It's often the case that immediate answers to questions are misleading, without some background. Some preliminary instruction provides a solid foundation for receiving wisdom. So, in like manner, following this Apostolic example of pastoral wisdom before us, I too will postpone finishing this point until tonight.

Alright, so we'll do that. Come back tonight, Lord willing, and finish the point. We'll address the issues that Paul raises here in the text. We'll also broaden the discussion to address questions about living the single life and the majority context



of marriage in the church and you're not going to want to miss all that Paul has to say to us, tonight.

Let's pray. Our father, we thank you for what we've been able to cover by your grace and by your wisdom. Thank you so much for giving us the Lord Jesus Christ and so much sound, fundamental, basic instruction on marriage, singleness and all the rest. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ giving his Holy Spirit to the apostles. In particular, the apostle Paul, who has so much wisdom that he's passed on to us in 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 7. Pray that you would take the things that we have learned together as a church; 75% of us in the married state, 25% of us in the unmarried state.

Pray that you would use these things to bring us closer together. To unite us, in mutual concern, for the purpose of mutual edification. For our thriving in the Christian life together. For our sanctification. For our pursuit of holiness. For our Christ likeness. All redounding to your glory, father, in the name of Jesus Christ our savior, amen.