



# GRACE CHURCH

## You Are Not Your Own

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

Grace Church Waco | 1.10.21

Friends, today we come to worship heavy. We come, I believe, ready to hear and receive the Word of God—most prominently because we need it. On Wednesday of this week at the capitol grounds, where a mob of political extremists violently broke into the halls and chambers of the capitol, two means of execution were erected not far from one another: one a cross, and one a gallows. The message was clear, whether intentional or not: violence and death for political enemies can reasonably stand alongside Christianity. But friends, nothing could be further from the truth. The cross is far different from the gallows. One is the justice of man, the other, the justice of God. In one we find the retribution of the state against man, in the other, the retribution of God against his only son.

I point this out to you to remind you that following Christ is not easy. Simply to invoke the name of Christ or use a symbol of Christ is not enough to really follow Christ. Following Christ does not just mean using his name or his banner for your purposes—it means going his way. Following Christ does not mean erecting a cross to give validity to your political movement, it means taking up your cross in surrender to his Lordship.

And so we come to worship today heavy. We are heavy because we bear the burdens of our sinful, violent, hateful and divisive world. But let me remind you: if you are in Christ, you have traded the burdens of the world for a new burden. You have laid down your gallows and taken up your cross. And it's not easy, bearing the weight of the lordship of Christ. But here is the good news that I call you to worship in today: you do not bear that burden alone. When you repent of your sin, come under the total authority of Jesus Christ, you are united to him by faith, yoked to him by the Holy Spirit. The cross you bear is carried not on your back, but on his in you. So we come to worship a cross-bearing Savior who brought about the justice of God so he can say to us who look out and feel the burden of a world covered with sin:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”



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This year, as you are hopefully already aware, part of our discipleship focus is learning and digesting a catechism together. Catechism is the historic practice of the church of rooting our hearts and minds in Biblical truth. One author compares catechism to the “logs” that we place on the fireplace of our hearts and minds, which then are ignited by the Holy Spirit and faith and burn into zeal and love for God.<sup>1</sup> So make no mistake: what you make a habit of believing is the fuel for what you are passionate about.

We tend to receive our identity from that which we believe is truth, so for instance if I asked you: “who are you?”, you might give me your gender, or your age, or your marital status, your profession, your race, or perhaps even your political or social affiliation. All those things may be true about you. But what catechism does is it teaches us, through repetition and memorization, that there are truths that shape our identity far beyond us. These truths, as they arise from God’s revelation in Scripture, form our identity far more than anything else about us. You could say that catechism is the process of the doctrine of scripture teaching us what is true and helping us digest that truth and internalize that truth until it becomes part of us.

This is exactly why the catechism we use, the New City Catechism, as it is based on historic catechism like the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism, begins with the question and answer we just professed last week:

Q. What is our only hope in life and death?

A. That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

Today we turn to 1 Corinthians 7 to answer this question: what does the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have to do with marriage, singleness, and sexuality? And the answer from the text comes in **verse 23**: you were bought with a price. Or, to put it another way, this idea is simply a repeat of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Here then is the truth that I believe transforms how we see our relationship status: **you are not your own**. This is what it means to be *bought*, or as **verse 22** tells us, to be a bondservant of Christ. The central idea of 1 Corinthians 7 is that in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the God-man come to earth to live and die and rise in order to purchase you for his own. And it’s that truth, that you belong to God in Christ, that changes everything about you, including your marriage and your singleness.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/catechize-kids/>



The most important part of the text, in my estimation, for understanding how the gospel speak to marriage and singleness here, is **verses 17-24**. The principles in that portion of our text, I believe, are used to apply the gospel into the areas of marriage and singleness. So we will go there last. You might say that part is like the meat of the sandwich of chapter 7. But on either side of the meat is the bread, which is still important (unless you are gluten free, I suppose). So Let's go to the bread first, which will show us in **verses 1-16** the restrictions of marriage, and in **verses 25-40**, the freedoms of singleness.

## The Restrictions of Marriage (1-16)

1 Corinthians is a book written to a confused church. They are a church desperate for gospel application, they need to know how what they have been taught to believe about Christ actually impacts their life. If you remember from our time in 2 Corinthians, the city of Corinth was made up primarily of self-made people, who loved to boast in themselves. There was also a culture of rampant sexual immorality, even in the church. This, alongside questions about church order and theological concerns about the nature of the body and spirit, means that Paul writes 1 Corinthians as a means to answer a whole host of problems and questions in Corinth.

An underlying problem in Corinth is their cultural dedication to not only social by spiritual status. When the gospel comes to Corinth, they are ready to accept it as a means to spiritual ascent, but it is harder to grasp that this gospel calls them to deny themselves, to boast in their weakness, to live quiet lives. So when we come to **verse 1** in our text, it seems like the culture of Corinth has caused some of the church to ask Paul if it is always sinful to engage in sex. Notice the quotation marks: this is the slogan of some in the Corinthian church. So ready are they to be affirmed as spiritually elite, they consider that marriage and sex is beneath those who now hold the name of Christ. This slogan adopted by the Corinthians leads us to believe that some in the church were advocating several strange requirements for new Christians. Since the carnality of sex is beneath the new enlightened believer, if you are single, you must abstain from marriage, and if you are married, you must either abstain from sex within your marriage or even consider absolving marriage itself!

We can clearly see here that this is a misapplication of the gospel. Right after arguing fiercely against sexual immorality in chapter 6, Paul here sets the record very straight in **7:1-5**. If you are abstaining from sexual intimacy with your spouse, he says, you are not being more holy but rather less holy! If you are married, Paul says, what will help you to abstain from sexual immorality is not banning all sex, but rather finding the right purpose for it.

Why does Paul say that abstinence from sexual intimacy in marriage is forbidden, expect perhaps by some agreement to prayer for a limited time? Because of what marriage represents. Look at what he says in **verse 4**. In marriage, the husband no longer has sole authority over his body, and neither does the wife: they share it with one another. Marriage, we know from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, is a representation of the mystery of the gospel. Of course, marriage pictures the gospel in many ways, but primarily this way: man leaves father and mother and holds fast to his



wife and they become *one flesh*. They no longer belong to themselves, they belong to one another. So too, the church, in being unified by faith to Christ by the Spirit, does not have authority over herself, she is Christ's. So don't miss that: the reason that Paul gives for not abstaining from sexual intimacy in marriage is a gospel reason: because marriage shows us that we are not self-autonomous, we are not our own, we are *bought*.

What is interesting about Paul's exchange with the Corinthians is although he disagrees with their reasoning for wanting to require singleness, he is not unfavorable to singleness. You might say that just because he is pro sex in the context of marriage, it does not mean that he is ant-singleness. Cultural voices may tell you today that the Christian ethic, by restricting sex to within marriage, is depriving you of freedom, somehow making you a lesser person with a lesser experience of life. But Paul actually says exactly the opposite in **verses 6-9**. In his opinion, it would be great if all Christians were single, as he is! Singleness, as we will see later as well, is not a state of lacking something, but rather Paul believes, the ideal state of the Christian.

Paul, however, concedes, and not commands, this point. He knows, as is clear in **verse 6**, that to assume singleness for all Christians is neither realistic, prudent, or commanded by God. He even concedes to say that marriage is to be preferred when self-control is not being exercised in singleness. He is not offering marriage as the remedy for sexual immorality, rather he is saying if you are already engaged in sexual immorality, marriage is a far better alternative, even if it is less than ideal to singleness. It's better to be married, with all the restrictions and less than-ideals that it brings, than to be constantly given over to the sin of sexual immorality and cheap sex, which for the Corinthians was likely prostitution. This leads him to his final point in this paragraph in **verse 10-11**. Just as abstaining from sex in marriage should not be an option for the Christian, neither should divorce. Why? Because even though singleness is Paul's ideal, it cannot justify divorce. Divorce, the text is implying, at least in most scenarios, is a rejection of the purpose of marriage. It's tearing apart one flesh, it's saying: I don't belong to my husband or wife, I belong to myself.

The reason Paul is so strong on divorce and remarriage in **verses 10-11** is because, as is noted in the text, Jesus himself spoke to this. Every time Jesus speaks to the issue of divorce, he is rejecting the Pharisaic interpretation of the Mosaic law which allowed essentially for a man to divorce his wife for any grounds. Jesus links marriage back to creation's authority, where God brings together man and wife. Paul brings that up here to reinforce his main point: divorce is not a justifiable alternative to the challenges of marriage. Women are to remain with their husbands and husbands with their wives. He further applies this to those who have unbelieving spouses in **verses 12-16**. Just because someone is married to an believer does not mean that they are free to absolve their marriage, as if it means nothing. No, if they can live together in relative peace, they should. The example of their faithful union, even if one partner does not show it, still preaches the gospel and promotes holiness. Who knows, Paul argues, perhaps by your faithfulness God will work salvation in your unbelieving spouse? It is important to note, however, that Paul provides a way of escape from marriage for someone who is abused or abandoned: if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so.



So let's zero in a bit here. We have several extremely practical answers to the Corinthians problems so far. Here are the restrictions of marriage: First, married couples are not to abstain from sexual intimacy in marriage, because they are not their own. Second, although singleness is ideal, marriage should not be ended lightly and divorce should not even be in the vocabulary of the Christian except in specific, extreme circumstances. Why? Because they are not their own. These are some of the gospel applications of marriage, and I believe they come to us in this text primarily through restrictions.

## The Freedoms of Singleness (25-40)

I won't spend much time here, as I think the points of the text are fairly straightforward, but let's consider the other side of this exegetical sandwich. Paul continues in this section to give deference to singleness as his preferred state of the Christian. Now remember, this is not common in this day. To be a single man was to imply you were outcast from society and not worthy of marriage, and to be a single woman was to imply that you were destitute and impoverished. So most people, as they do today, got married.

But in **verses 25-31** Paul grounds his preference for singleness as the Christian ideal in eschatology. Eschatology is imply the study of the end times, the eschaton. Paul says in **verse 31**, the present form of the world is passing away. The time, **verse 29**, is growing short. Christians ought to live not focused on what they can attain, on marriage and relationships as an end in themselves, but on the coming kingdom of God. In Paul's mind, anything that distracts from that mission may be more harm than it is worth. Even if you are married, he says, the Christian mission forms in such a way that to outsiders, it may even appear that we don't have a wife or husband! This is how serious the coming of Christ is, how much it should occupy our thoughts and those of our spouse. We should find ourselves at times so lost together in the mission of God that we almost forget we are married. So the single are free, he says, from worrying about a world that is passing away.

The single is also free for anxiety, Paul's main point in **verses 32-35**. Married men and women have their priorities divided: they are distracted at times from the kingdom of God, caught up in all sorts of affairs of life. Not so for the single, they have the freedom to devote undivided attention to the kingdom and the work of God.

It's these reasons, these "freedoms", if you will, that Paul states again in **verse 38** what he has already made clear earlier: he believes remaining single is the best choice for the Christian. Yet he is careful in **verses 36-37** to remind us that getting married is good: it showcases the gospel and it is not sin, as some of the Corinthians may have been proposing. Marriage is good, singleness is better. Why? Because Jesus is coming back soon, and the single have an opportunity to leverage their life in tangible, specific ways for the kingdom of God. in a church with plenty of young singles, we see this evidently. We miss them when they are gone, they are so vital to our mission and to us



growing in godliness together. They are undivided, and the opportunity is there to give their attention to the mission of God and to the church.

So Paul ends this chapter in **verses 39-40** with a reminder that marriage is an earthly thing, it does not extend past this world. Remarriage is permissible and can be very healthy and good, especially for widows who would need the financial support, but in Paul's mind, even the widows have an opportunity in their new found singleness to give their undivided attention to God, an opportunity they shouldn't take lightly.

Why is singleness so attractive to Paul? I think it's because of what we saw in regards to marriage, and what we will see as we turn to verses 17-24. The freedom of singleness is a gift because it provides an opportunity to say "I am not my own".

## **Bought With A Price (17-24)**

**Verse 17** serves as the undergirding commanding principle of this entire text. Notice the actor here: the Lord assigns us to a specific life, not ourselves. Here we have the repudiation of self-autonomy. When Paul uses the word "called" in **verse 17**, he means being "called by God" in salvation in Christ. He uses this language from the beginning of 1 Corinthians, when he explains in 1:9, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." So the principle verse 17 is teaching us is: whatever state, whatever life, you are in when you are called by God into Christ, live that life.

The text illustrates this point with two scenarios that are not marriage or singleness. First, Paul uses circumcision. As an outward sign of ethnic and religious identity, circumcision is a very serious marker of identity at this time. By suggesting that the uncircumcised should not seek circumcision nor the circumcised seek to cover up his circumcision, he is making a profound point which he gives in **verse 19**. To say "circumcision does not count for anything" is a serious claim. What is Paul saying? He is showing that your ethnic, religious standing, the identity you have as belonging to the Jewish people, the chosen people, really doesn't matter in the end. What matters is faithfulness to God. We may say it like this: if you are in Christ, whatever race, gender, sexual orientation, age, or relational status you possess, what is most important about your identity is this: God has called you to love and obey him.

We live in a culture that is confused about identity, don't we? Look no further for evidence than the example of the transgender movement. Created a man, that same man can now proclaim: "I am really a woman" and he is celebrated. Why? Because we see identity as something internal, something malleable, something we get to fashion and we get to define. So we change jobs constantly, we change relationship partners, we change cities, we change styles, we even change our genders, because we are taught: "you are the master of your identity! You can be whoever you feel you are!" So it's no wonder that the ethics of Scripture and of Christian tradition are mocked



and hated and called bigotry or oppression, because have you read **verse 20**? Who wants to hear that? Remain in your condition, be faithful where you are planted! Who wants to hear that?

But this is exactly the truth the gospel teaches us. Look how Paul doubles down in **verses 21-22**. Are you a slave, a bondservant? Do not be concerned, your identity is more than your economic freedom! Freedom is given by God, and you should take it if given the opportunity, but even if you were enslaved and bound in chains, you are free in the Lord. Not even the most oppressive identity you can imagine supersedes who you are in Christ. In the same way, if you are free when you come to Jesus, don't be prideful! Remember, you are a bondservant of Christ. Your identity is not in your freedom, but rather your service to the kingdom of the Son.

So again we come to the most important verses in chapter 7, **verse 23-24**. You were bought with a price. That price was the costly blood Jesus—spilled out to redeem you from your sin and from your propensity to be defined by all the things about you that aren't him! Bought, not so that you could be autonomous, but so that you could be freed from slavery to sin and given over to the authority of a better, eternally kind master. So then, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Friends, in a world where we are identified by relationships and sexuality, the gospel frees us from having to be enslaved to worldly identities. This is such good news: if you have been purchased by Christ, being single isn't your primary identity! Neither is being married, and neither is what sex you find yourself attracted to. You are being taught that you should find your value in how you choose—choose to be single or married, choose who you sleep with or don't—but the gospel frees us from all that! It allows us to say: I am not my own, I belong, body and soul, in life and death, to God and to my savior Jesus Christ.

I believe that this is central in helping us to understand how the gospel speaks to our relationships. It means that if you are married, there will be days where you feel restricted. Marriage may seem like hard work, work that oftentimes may not feel worth it. You feel at times you have missed one another, you've lost that spark or that chemistry, whatever it is. It's not exciting anymore, it's not working, there is no common ground. Deep friendships are hard to come by, because you spend so much time with your spouse or family or at work. And isn't this the cultural proposition of marriage? You must be having fun and romantic chemistry at all times the world tells us, otherwise the restrictions, the ball and chain of marriage, outweighs the benefits? And if the benefits are no longer there, why continue? No fault divorce is one of the most serious legal tragedies of our age, and no one talks about it. Marriage is a restriction of our freedom to be ourselves, it's oppressive. The fact that there is no spiritual or historical support for Christian marriage being anything other than one man and one woman, for life, we are told, is oppressive and outdated! Marriage as it is defined by God is restricting me, pastor, how am I supposed to continue? Can't I just change it, can't I just stop or divorce or cease to care?

And to that I say: you are not your own, you are bought with a price. Christ has bought you and freed you from the burden of a perfect marriage so that you can have a faithful one. You are not a





slave to your marriage, you are a slave to Christ. And when you follow your master by faith, he will make your marriage full of fruit for his kingdom. All the restrictions of marriage will feel like blessed burdens to carry as the years pass and you see just how beautiful one-flesh union really is. As you carry on, you will begin to realize marriage is not an oppressive chain, it's a painting. It takes hard work, it takes some creativity, but you are painting a picture of the gospel. You are not your marriage, but when you are Christ's, the gospel transforms your marriage to make it holy.

If you are not your own, but belong body and soul, in life and death, to God and to my savior Jesus Christ, then it impacts your singleness. Perhaps you feel singleness is a restriction, but really it is freedom. You are free to choose for yourself, to not worry about caring for or supporting someone else all the time. So if freedom and self-autonomy is such a valued commodity in our society, why is singleness seen as such a burden? Why do we have so many singles so desperate for intimacy that they live together before marriage, that they engage in free and no guilt sex? Why, maybe closer to home, are so many singles in the church unsatisfied and angry at their state, desperate to change it at all costs?

I think it's because singleness can be deceiving. It can trick us into thinking: in my freedom, I belong to no one by myself. And when we belong to no one but ourselves, we walk straight into bondage. The single who uses his or her singleness only to please and satisfy himself will never find satisfaction. No matter the success or the amount of sexual partners, no matter the freedom to travel and move and chase your dreams, you will not be satisfied until you realize you are not your own. Although you are free, you really are a bondservant to Christ. And so your singleness is a gift, not to use to benefit yourself or to get yourself a husband or wife, but a gift to use in the service of your master Jesus Christ.

What is the secret of the gospel that changes our marriage and our singleness? It's that we don't have to be unsatisfied with our status. We don't have to seek to change. Perhaps in God's providence, we will. We will find a wife or a husband, to the glory of God. Perhaps in God's providence we are not going to be married until our lives end, and we will be separated by death or some other tragedy. But change is not our master. We don't belong to marriage or to singleness, we belong to God. Jesus Christ the righteous went up to a roman cross to purchase you. Our aim is to please him to whom we belong. Let me leave you with two pastoral charges each for either of your stages of life.





If you are married:

You are not your own. Strive to please God, not your spouse, first, and he will give you peace no matter the difficulty of marriage.

You are not your own. Do not look down on the single or consider them lacking because of their relational status, or envy them in their freedom.

If you are single:

You are not your own. Remember that your singleness is not a tool to exercise your own self-autonomy, but rather a precious gift to please and glorify God wholeheartedly.

You are not your own. Stop seeing marriage as the goal of your life, and rather strive to live as God has called you. If you date, do so in a way that values your singleness instead of despising it.

