

6/9/24

[Connection] Good morning Cornerstone! My name is Joe and I am one of the Pastors here. It is good to be with you. Thank you for joining us this morning. If this is your first time worshiping with us, I want to invite you to fill out our connection card. It just lets us get to know you a little more and be able to connect with you more. If Cornerstone is home for you, you can use our app to check in and let us know you are here. There you can also fill out a prayer request so we can be praying for you throughout the week.

[Title] We are going to be continuing our sermon series called 'Church in Crisis' where we have been studying the book of 1st Corinthians. We have gone over a lot in this book, where Paul addresses the dangers that this church fell into 2000 years ago and were only in chapter 7. Paul after he planted this church he traveled to other regions doing the same. While he traveled this church in the city of Corinth created a lot of problems for themselves. They created compromises to the truth in the gospel and the teachings that Paul left them with.

This letter Paul is addressing the things that have been problems for them, and caused incredible compromises to their representation of the gospel. They allowed for divisions, sacrificed moral integrity for cultural relevance, and they allowed sexual immorality in their midst, even taking each other to court. All of these issues hindered their ability to witness to the world around them. As we continue in this letter we are picking up where we left off in Chapter 7 where Paul has addressed the things that he heard about them and has begun to answer questions that people in the church had asked him about in their letter.

Today our scripture is going to be found in **1 Corinthians 7:17-40**. If you have your bibles go ahead and turn there if you would like to follow along with us. If you do not have a paper bible and would like one we have some available for you in the back. You can also follow along with us today on the app with the scripture and our sermon notes available to you there.

But before we dive in the teaching today, lets read a part of our passage this morning together which comes from the book of **1 Corinthians 7:22-24**. So let us stand as you are able, out of reverence for God's word as we proclaim the truth in God's word.

[1] SCRIPTURE 1 Corinthians 7:22-24

"For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God."

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

INTRO

[2] Last week when we started studying chapter 7 of this letter. It was heavily focused on marriage and the dynamics of marriage. This week is part 2 of the dynamics that Paul was talking about in this chapter. He is finishing his thought on not only the idea of marriage but how we are to balance marriage and how we are to live for Christ in a way that evangelizes to an unbelieving world.

We covered a lot last week about sex, marriage and divorce. Some of you this week told me it was one of your favorite messages I preach so far. Many of you only say that because affirmed Paul in saying that if

your spouse wants to have sex you should do so. If that was all the permission you need and the only thing you took away, I guess you're welcome?

Just as a refresher we talked about how Paul's motivation for everything that he said in the previous section was his motivation against immorality. He says that being married is a safeguard against sexual immorality, something that was running rampant in the church. In the dynamics of marriage, sex is something to be enjoyed. When the 2 become one flesh as described by Paul, in reference to the Genesis account, it is a physical representation of the 2 lives melding into one cohesive and intertwined life. Sex is a way to not only safeguard against immorality but a way of connecting with your spouse.

We also said that for those that are unmarried, if they are seeking out a partner, they had to weigh all of the factors before they get married or continue down that path. First and foremost being single or unmarried can be a gift. It is a way to serve God in any capacity without having to consider the cost that would be to your family. Which Paul will elaborate on more in our section today. He said that even though it is a good thing, it cannot be the cause for separation from a spouse for those who are currently married. Singleness is preferred but it should not be desired if you are already married. For those that are single and are desiring to be married they also have to understand what marriage is.

Secondly, it is a commitment for life. Divorce is not an option for those who are believers, even if you are married to someone that does not share the same beliefs as you do. Paul justified this claim because your marriage to someone could be the avenue that God uses to bring them to salvation. For this purpose, he encourages those who are married to remain married and those who are single to remain single so that the purpose of the gospel can be advanced in the world they live in.

This is where we pick up this morning in our passage where Paul talks about the circumstances that we were saved in and how we are to remain in them as a servant of Christ.

BODY

[3] 1 Corinthians 7:17

"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."

This is Paul referring to salvation. Those who God had called to salvation, they should continue on in the marital situation they were in when God called them to be saved. Last week we talked about how there were people in the church that were abstaining from sex with their spouse in pursuit of singleness, or were leaving and divorcing their current spouse, because of a difference of belief, to remarry someone of the same belief.

This could have been motivated by the misconception that being intimate with a spouse that did not believe somehow defiled them or having children with said spouse was prohibited. Paul said this is not the case because it can lead to their unbelieving spouse coming to salvation.

When we read this, we have to bring all of the context that led up to this, to understand what Paul is not saying. He is telling them to remain in their circumstances. Initially he is focused on marriage, but will say how it applies to other circumstances as well. The primary focus right now is marriage. If the situation that someone was in, was a circumstance that was immoral Paul is not saying you are bound to that immorality.

If someone was a prostitute when they were called to salvation, they are not being called to remain a prostitute now that they are saved. Or if someone is married but it is a homosexual relationship, Paul is not calling them to remain in that marriage. That relationship would be considered immoral, and Paul's concern is for them to fight against immorality through marriage. For Paul to tell them to remain in an immoral circumstance would violate the previous things that Paul addressed. In context the circumstances that they are to remain in is a marriage of God's design, man and a woman, even if their spouse is not a believer.

Paul says that this rule or instruction is something that is universal. It is something that he tells all of the people in the churches that he has planted, and has relationship with. He says this because Paul is not calling them to something that he does not apply to others. Paul is not calling them to this because it was some sort of punishment because of their wrongdoing. It is a universal truth applied to all people.

[4] 1 Corinthians 7:18-19

"Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcison. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcison. For neither circumcison counts for anything nor uncircumcison, but keeping the commandments of God."

This is where Paul is expanding on this staying in your circumstance, to other aspects where it applies, other than the marriage. Specifically, he is addressing the practice of circumcison. There are a couple things that Paul alludes too here, for us to understand we need some cultural context.

Circumcison was a command given to Abraham from God as a sign of his covenant with him and it was a practice for all the people of Israel. On the eighth day of a male child's birth, he was to be circumcised. Any of the offspring of Abraham, the people of Israel, that was not circumcised was cut off from God's covenant with them¹. Since this was a primarily Jewish custom, it was a foreign practice to the gentiles.

In fact many of the gentiles despised circumcison. They considered it to be mutilation. This may have caused some Christian Jews in Corinth to feel ashamed of their circumcison. To the point where they would seek out a surgery called 'epispasm', that would disguise the marks of circumcison. To the Jews who were circumcised Paul says 'do not seek to remove the marks of circumcison' referring to this surgical procedure. Paul says to the gentiles who were not circumcised, they should not seek to now become circumcised because of their new found faith in Christ. They are to remain as they are circumcised or uncircumcised.

Because this was a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, the Jews heavily valued circumcison. It identified them as God's people. Since now, Jesus has come and the gospel has been shared to the gentiles, he is not telling the gentiles that they have to adopt this practice of circumcison. To the people of Israel, circumcison was a command of God, but Paul creates a paradox in verse 19, they are to keep the commands of God, and not to seek circumcison, which was a command of God. How can both be true?

This is all about context and the whole picture of scripture. The context in the Old testament, the sign of circumcison was given specifically to the people of Israel as a sign of the covenant with Abraham. That covenant was tied to Abraham's bloodline and has changed because of Christ. Salvation is not only available to the Jews but to all who have faith in Christ. In the new covenant, circumcison is spiritual.

¹ Genesis 17:9-14

Paul tells us that it is a circumcision of the heart. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a sign of the new covenant.

[5] Colossians 2:11-12

"In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Circumcision then is replaced by the Spirit as a sign of the new covenant. Abrahamic circumcision is no longer seen as a command of God for those who are in Christ. For the people of Corinth, there is no reason for them to seek it out or to be ashamed of it, because it does not hold the value that it was did but it is also not void of its significance. The effort then that is to count for something that Paul says in 7:19 is to keep the commands of God. Which commands?

Jesus summarized the whole law in 2 commands,

[6] Matthew 27:37-40

"And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Paul affirmed this law of Love,

[7] Romans 13:8-10

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Paul does this again in his letter of Galatians². This fulfillment of the Law is a moral standard that is motivated by a love for God, first and foremost. Secondly it is fulfilled through a love for people.

[8] So back to our passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul is placing value on the commandments of God saying that they are the things that count. This is Paul appealing to morality. Without explicitly saying it, this is Paul telling them to remain in a circumstance that allows you to maintain morality. As he continues to explain this, he is laying the foundation in its purpose as morality.

[9] 1 Corinthians 7:20-22

"Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. ²¹Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) ²²For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ."

Paul indicates three elements of remaining in circumstances that hinge on morality. He talked about marriage, where it is not immoral for them to remain married to someone that is not a believer. To be circumcised or uncircumcised is not a violation of morality. Now he introduced this status of

² Galatians 6:1-5

servanthood, which more than likely includes someone's occupation or financial responsibility. Again, as it hinges on morality. To be a prostitute would be a violation of God's moral commands, so they should not remain in that occupation. However, if there is no moral violation they should remain as they were called.

There is some debate on what Paul insinuates by using this term of bondservant. It can be someone who is a slave, through indentured servitude. Meaning a someone is a slave because they are working off a debt that is owed. Or it could mean someone who has chosen to remain in service to someone, as a job, after they have now worked off a previous debt to that master. Which is how our finances will tie into this passage. I think that it should be treated in this passage to include both possibilities.

Some of the dynamics that feed into this, believers in Corinth were concerned about social status, as was brought up in previous chapters. They were concerned that their social status hindered their ability to live for God. Being a bondservant would have classified them as the lowest of individuals on the social status ladder. Believers who were considered bondservants, would have attempted to leave this occupation or abandoned the debt that they owed so that they could be in a better position to live in their newfound belief.

Paul tells them that their status as a slave, did not hinder their ability to be called into salvation and will not hinder their service to God. Because they have the same Holy Spirit that declared us all free throughout Christ as someone who is considered free. Which is why he tells them to not let this be an area of concern if they are a bondservant.

Paul adds the caveat, that if they have the opportunity for them to gain their freedom that they should take it. This status of being a bondservant is a circumstance where if they do not have to be bound to it, they do not have an obligation to remain. If they have the ability to escape financial bondage they should escape it. This is not the same as the circumstance of marriage or circumcision because it is not supported theologically, like the teachings of divorce or the understanding of the new covenant.

This is Paul reassuring those in this circumstance, if that is where they are and continue to be, it does not put them at a deficit spiritually like it is for them socially. If they are a bondservant, then they are to consider themselves free in Christ and are to remain in working off their debt in obedience to God as a part of God's household³. Those that are free or not a bondservant they should consider themselves as such because they are to regard Christ as their master. They are bondservants to Christ, since they no longer belong to themselves, and they should be obedient to him.

[10] 1 Corinthians 7:23-24

"You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. ²⁴ So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God."

This is the second time that Paul has reminded them that they were bought like a slave at the price of Christ's death⁴. As we said a couple weeks ago, slaves can only be purchase by a master from another master in that culture. The imagery that Paul is using is that we were purchased by Christ as our new master, from their previous master that was sin and death. Therefore, we are indebted to Christ for our salvation. We have an obligation of obedience, because of the debt that was paid for our salvation.

³ Colossians 4:1

⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:2

Because of that purchase, we are to consider ourselves as a bondservant of Christ, even if they are free in the social status.

Paul's instruction to not become the bondservants of men is a future command. They should not purposefully place themselves in the position to enter these circumstances. As with marriage and circumcision, they should not seek to marry an unbeliever for the purpose of the salvation of that individual. In the same way that someone should not seek out circumcision if they are not already.

Paul's desire is for them to be focused on Christ. He does not want them to enter into slavery to men. We should not enter as bondservants (indebted to men), under the wisdom of men, the traditions of men, social structures, the traditions of the social acceptance of divorce, or slavery or circumcision. These are all things that create distractions away from what Christ has for them. Paul does not want them to have things that pull away from their true purpose and the calling in their salvation. Debt would be something that would pull them away from this worship. If they are indebted to another they are working to fulfill the obligation to that debt and not working to fulfill their obligation to Christ. It not impossible to do both. But in the modern sense if you have extra money from a bonus or extra overtime, you have the option to tithe or to pay off your mortgage, majority of us will choose to pay our mortgage. Because we feel a greater obligation to the debt than we do to Christ. Paul is calling them to focus on Christ even if they are a slave to what is owed so they can fulfill the commands of Christ in their circumstances.

To fulfill the commands of God, preach the gospel and work out their salvation to become more Christ-like. All of which hinges again on their morality. This is Paul creating the understanding of the basis for Paul's instruction. He bases all of it on morality, found in the commands of Christ. When they are undistracted, they can focus on the things that really matter. Having said that he redirects back to those that are unmarried to expand on this understanding.

[11] 1 Corinthians 7:25-27

"Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife."

Paul says that he is giving his understanding, to those who are unmarried, what they are to do. This is not specific because there was no explicit teaching in black and white on what needs to be done. Even though there isn't a specific teaching to reference, Paul is coming to them with the authority that he has in Christ and out of the basis of morality that he just talked about.

There were probably people in the church that were telling those that are engaged, that they should not get married. It was probably motivated by church leaders looking out for the person's spiritual growth, but they were taking a suggestion to the church by Paul and making it a command for all the people, which it was not intended to be. So what Paul is teaching is addressing that assumption, and what he believes in the right call for them to benefit spiritually.

The present distress that Paul is referring to could be one of two things. In Corinth there were 3 periods of acute grain shortages at the time of this letter being written. Food was scarce for the people and in 51 AD, right after Paul left the church to travel to Ephesus. The city also suffered a serious earthquake around the same time. This may have been why some Christians thought that life was hard enough as it

is, without children or distractions. It was currently difficult to be single, so they should not take on another burden of being married. Or be distracted away from God by having sexual intimacy with their spouse potentially having children and more mouths to feed in such a difficult time.

The second possibility, and the one that I think makes the most sense according to the rest of the passage, Paul is referring to the second coming of Christ. Jesus, when he talked about coming back after his resurrection, he predicted that it would be preceded by distress⁵. He said there will be wars, famine, earthquakes, various terrors and signs from heaven as a beginning of the pains from the earth crying out for redemption. The church in Corinth would have seen these circumstances that they were facing, as an indicator that Christ return was imminent.

In light of the times, they are in they are to remain as they are, unmarried, because the time to complete the work of Christ was running out. So, they should not take on the responsibility of marriage so they could focus on doing the work of Christ. They are unbound by the permanent nature of marriage vows. Vows that remove the free ability to do whatever God called them to do without consideration of a family. He states in the next verses if they do marry...

[12] 1 Corinthians 7:28-29a

"But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. ²⁹ This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short."

If they do marry it is not a sin for them, as in, it is not a violation of morality and will not be counted against them. As he said before, marriage is a safeguard against immorality. The teaching that Paul gave them, about it being good that a man should not marry, some in the church probably took it too far. They declared being married to be sinful, which Paul says it is not true.

He does point out that those that are married will have worldly troubles. Where marriage is not sinful, he does acknowledge that married couples will face difficulties and Paul's desire is to spare them from that.

A few weeks ago, we read all those statistics about how happy married people are and how they will live longer than those that are unmarried. The last 3 weeks my wife has so kindly reminded me of those statistics saying that I cannot blame my grey hairs on her anymore because being married to me makes me live longer. So, if your spouses have done the same thing to you, give them a nudge and make sure they are paying attention. Being married may make people live longer, but in that longer life they will have more worldly trouble than those who are unmarried. Some translations say that they will have "affliction of the flesh"⁶.

This is Paul pointing out that he knows marriage is hard. An example of this worldly trouble would be, couples who work, you are going to constantly be worried about providing a better life for your spouse and your kids. You're thinking about how you are going to pay for lasting memories and making ends meet. If you were alone the hardship is not as big of a concern because there isn't the dynamic of a family.

⁵ Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11

⁶ LEB – Lexham English Bible

This is Paul pointing to the tension of ministry opportunities and the responsibility of Family. When you have a family, you have physical responsibilities to do the things that are necessary to fulfill their needs or spending time with them. Time, energy and effort doing all of those things for your family, is time energy and effort that is narrowed in focus, to serve God by serving your family as opposed to service that is unlimited in God's calling for those without such responsibilities.

This is not to insinuate that having a family or being married is bad. To identify that one lifestyle is positive does not mean that the opposite is negative. We talked about this last week. What Paul is saying is that those that are not married yet have options. One option is to be married. You can faithfully serve your family in a way that honors God and grows disciples in and through the marriage dynamic. However, it has its limitations, because of the responsibility associated. The other option is to remain unmarried, which is only limited by God's ability to use the individual in his service to grow the kingdom of God without any other obligations.

Paul emphasizes this point and the importance of Christ's work in the world, because our time on earth is short. God is not going to allow the circumstances of life on earth to endure forever. Again, the church sees the things that are going on in their world and they are to perceive that Christ's return is imminent and could happen at any moment. Because of this Paul says...

[13] 1 Corinthians 7:29b-31

"From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away."

Paul is saying that as the time of the Lord's second coming is drawing near, the church should not be consumed by worldly concerns or matters. They should not allow such things to control their lives. They should be focused on the spiritual concerns.

When Paul says that someone who is married should live as though they do not have a wife, he is not going back on what he said about living like your single again, like some of them were already doing. He is not contradicting himself. He is trying to adjust their focus. Concerning marriage he is urging those who are married to avoid being distracted from God by their spouse. He includes this with other issues to tell them they are to change their attitude towards earthly things.

Even though marriage is by divine appointment, it is a temporal arrangement⁷, that dissolves in death and on Christ's return⁸. He references mourning, Joy, buying things and even living in this world. Sadness, joy and material possessions are not decisive in the life of a Christian Paul is looping marriage into this category as well. There is something of greater significance for them. Now, these things are fleeting, they provide the content of life, so they are not insignificant. Paul is not under the illusion that life's framework (marriage, sorrow, joy, possessions) can be discredited altogether. People will get married, they will experience sorrow and joy, they will participate in the aspects of this world like buying and selling goods.

⁷ Mark 12:19-25

⁸ Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39

Paul's concern is that the believers live in order to please God. Those things done in the will of God and for his glory are the things that have lasting value. Paul said in Romans 12, that we are to mourn with those who mourn, rejoice with those who rejoice, living in peace with all. That way of life is for the purpose or is done with the focus of bringing God glory.

There are many that think Paul had Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 in mind when he wrote this verse. Ecclesiastes states all these aspects of life are meaningless without God. There is a time for everything, but Paul is saying, in the timeline of the coming of Christ, the world as we know it is coming to an end. We do not have time to waste on being distracted. Our progress for the gospel cannot be held back by the things of this world, because the church has work to do.

[14] 1 Corinthians 7:32-34

"I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. ³³ But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband."

When comparing the things of God, everything else becomes secondary. If our focus is on our spouses or our children solely, as in without a heavenly perspective, than it is not on God's work. Everything we do in life, our marriage interactions with our children, the things we buy, how we respond in sorrow, or in joy, all should be shaped by a heavenly perspective.

[15] This is all about balance.

Taking the example of Marriage, it entails a lot of responsibilities, for a husband and a wife equally, as we naturally seek to please our spouses and God. An arrangement like marriage though, inevitably leads to divided interests. What if what pleases God and what please our spouse are in conflict? The will of God should be our #1 priority, always. This does not mean that if your spouse is in the hospital, you need to leave them there alone so that you can come to a women's ministry event, or our men's group 'Fight Club'. Even though I think our men's and women's ministry is good and you should be involved, your spouse needs you there. If your spouse is home alone with all the kids, Paul is not saying you should pretend that it is not a reality, so that you can spend all day, every day, sharing the gospel with people on the street. We all should be doing that because it is a great thing and has value, but it cannot constantly be a bill that is paid by a family suffering with a parent that is MIA.

Both of these examples are good things, don't get me wrong. **Balance is found though in the community and seeing every opportunity as an ability to share the gospel.** If your spouse is in the hospital, be there with them. Get the materials from the bible study from the group leader but take the time to read scripture with your spouse in the hospital. Seize this opportunity to share the gospel with the other patients, family members, nurses and doctors. Then return to the small group when you are able.

If you are involved in a street ministry of sharing the gospel with strangers, have a team of people willing to do it with you so that it is not all on you. Take the opportunity to share the gospel with those strangers, but we also have to see discipling your kids and help them grow in their faith as an opportunity that is just as important. **If the will of God is our #1 priority, our marriages, our circumstances, and our occupation and finances should not hinder our participation in the work of the gospel.**

[16] 1 Corinthians 7:35

"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."

When Paul is saying this to those that are unmarried, his intent is not to deprive them of the opportunity to get married, but to ensure complete and total devotion to the Lord. To ensure this complete single-minded focus on the service for God. Paul is saying this not to create more anxiousness in their lives, but the opposite. He said these things to alleviate the anxiety concerning these things so they can benefit. Paul knows and recognizes the tension of attempting to please both a spouse and God. His desire is not that these things are eliminated from the life of a believer but that all things in life are in their proper order, **so that our devotion to Christ is secure and uncompromised.**

[17] 1 Corinthians 7:36-38

"If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. 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. ³⁸ So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better."

He is saying that if someone is engaged and he feels it would not be honorable to break off his engagement because of his passions for her, yes he is referring to sexual desire. Let's be honest if he is getting married he should be passionate for her. This is not simply a desire for another person sexually. The Greek word for this passion is 'eimi' which is a state of being. His passion for her is a desire not just to have sex with her but to be united as one flesh with her in a state of being. His passion is to be united with her in a new state of being.

Paul is saying if they determine it is not honorable and he cannot control his desire to be with her then he should get married. Again, he states what he did before, it would not be sinful for him to enter marriage. But the opposite is also true in that if someone is engaged and his sexual desire or passion is under control, it would be good for him to not rush into marriage. Meaning for them to remain in the previous timeline of their engagement, which could be months or years. It would even be good for them both to remain unmarried.

[18] 1 Corinthians 7:39-40

"A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 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."

This is again a special highlight to the widows in the church. They have been freed from their previous marriage because of the death of their husbands. They can remarry, but Paul adds the condition that they can only be married to another believer, that is what he means when he says marry any one she wishes 'only in the Lord'. This is what we talked about last week. Paul is not advocating for evangelistic dating. He is not advising the believers in the church to marry those that are not believers with the intent to win them over to the gospel. This comes from chapter 7, verse 8 and 9 and verse 25-28.

Whenever Crystal and I are meeting with someone, and they talk about starting to date someone, the first question that we ask them is, "are they a believer?". We ask because if not, then their end goal of

being married, is not a possibility in that relationship. They should not be entering into a marriage with someone that does not share in the mandate of Christ in the time on earth for the gospel. If they cannot marry them because of this difference in belief they should not be dating, which is just preparation to marriage, despite what the culture may present.

Paul expands on this in his other letter to the church in Corinth, 'do not be yoked with unbelievers'⁹. As in do not enter into labor with someone who is not a believer because while you are putting shoulder to the plow for the work of the gospel, the one you are now one flesh, intertwined in life with, is someone that is not working towards the same goal. Which is why in that verse in 2 Corinthians he says that the believer and the unbeliever have nothing in common. You do not share in the thing that is the #1 priority in your life.

[19] These conditions are motivated by the same thing Paul has been addressing. It has the basis of morality. There is an understanding of the troubles that come from being married and account for the timeline of Christ return. It is for the believers benefit and remove the anxiety when it comes to the future life, being united with another person choosing to enter into marriage with someone that does not share the truth you base your life on multiplies the trouble a hundred-fold. Which is why he makes the stipulation because marriage is for life.

Which is why he gives the option again, that they could remarry or they could be happy in their singleness. Living in the gift of celibacy that he mentions in verse 6 and 7. He contends that she might even be more content and happy in singleness than in marriage.

Paul ends this section and all the things that he has address with the reminder of the authority in which he shares these things saying that he has the Spirit of God also. Where it establishes his authority, it also was a bit of a dig at the church itself in the high esteem it held itself to. The Church was arrogant in their claims of being spiritual.

These spiritual people have been giving advice to the people in the church and probably claimed the same authority of the Holy Spirit, because they had the Holy Spirit it was presented as sound advice that the people should follow. In this chapter we have seen that they have actually misrepresented the truth in this guise of being 'spiritual'. This bad advice and misrepresentation of truth led to many people being misguided in their decisions and feeling troubled and even guilty for following this 'spiritual' advice. Paul is saying that he is filled with the Holy Spirit and is able to provide the authoritative and wise instruction that they need concerning these issues. His wisdom is counsel that is to be trusted.

APPLICATION

When we look at this passage and try to decipher how we are supposed to apply all of this, it can feel like a lot. Paul covers such a wide range of things in this passage over so many different contexts, how can we know where to start? In order to answer that question, we have to follow Paul's train of thought and understand how we apply it. We talked about relations between salvation, morality, Christ-like character, and our circumstances. The best way to understand this is to see visually how they relate to each other. To see this, picture a tree.

[20] First, we have to start with a basis of morality. Paul distinguishes that morality in the commands of God should be our first concern in all of the circumstances.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

[21] Our morality is fueled and the tree is nourished by the gospel and the works of Christ in our salvation. They work together. We can be moral because of the work of Christ and our morality is shaped by Jesus. If we are the tree, we derive nourishment from our salvation and we grow and bear fruit when we depend on Christ. Morality is not what saves us, but it is through our moral standard that we are shaped to be like Christ.

[22] The trunk of the tree is our Christ-like character. It is developed through the work of the Holy Spirit within us. We work with the Holy Spirit through obedience. Working collaboratively to look more and more like Christ. The Holy Spirit guides and convicts to reveal Christ in us for all to see as a testimony of what Christ has done.

[23] The branches then are our circumstances. In our marriages we grow closer together purposefully and intentionally. We connect through sexual intimacy, through our unconditional love for our spouse and in the way that we lead or submit to our spouse physically and spiritually.

[24] With our children, we take every opportunity to shape and mold them to love Christ, as much if not more than we do. We do this through example. The example of how we devote our time, energy, effort and finances to serve God's purposes. They see our example and replicate it. When we as parents love our children, they desire to be like us.

It is also directedly imputed to them by what we teach. We show them all of the things that the bible teaches. We show them how to take the truth in scripture and apply it to their own lives. With our instruction they develop a love for and dependance on God's word.

[25] In our worship, Paul mentions indirectly in this passage to our finances. We are not to be a slave to any man. Many of you may say I am no slave, but remember a bondservant was someone who was working to pay off a debt, and we all have that. If we have enough of it, we become a slave to paying off that debt. When we worship God through our finances, we give to him as a steward of what has been given, not just to work to close out on a house we cannot afford or student loans that we wished we didn't take out. Which is why there are so many organizations that are faith-based that are working to help people be debt free. Without that bondage there is freedom to serve God financially to the best of our ability. By having debt, it does not eliminate our ability to serve God financially, if these are our circumstances how do we serve in them?

[26] In our singleness we serve God whole heartedly. We are not distracted by the things of this world like our joy or sorrow, our living in this world or even in a marriage, because we are singularly focused on pleasing God and God alone.

[27] In all of these circumstances, they are motivated by our main priority which is our service to God. It is through him that we are saved. It is through him that we understand morality and immorality, he defines it. It is through him and his Holy spirit that we develop Christ-like character. It is through him that we are able to glorify him in all of our circumstances, which is the desire in our service to him.

[28] When we glorify him in all of our circumstances we produce fruit for the gospel.

We achieve all of this when our first priority is set on God and everything else in life comes second. That means our marriage, our children, our jobs, and our financial status. Without God's glory as our main

focus, we will just be chasing our tails trying to be a good person in our circumstances without an objective morality and without the power of salvation. **Without those things we will be producing bad fruit.**

The truth is life is hard. It is hard to manage our finances and get out of debt and stay out of debt. It is hard to be married, we have an affliction in our flesh. It is hard to raise kids, it's hard to be single. All of these things are difficult, but that is why the promises of God in his new covenant are so amazing!

GOSPEL

Christ died for our salvation to make us into a new creation. We have hope in all of our circumstances because our life and our understanding of right and wrong are founded and grounded in Christ. We do not have to be worried about all of these things without hope. We do not have to be aimless in our pursuit of anything. We do not have to be overwhelmed by sorrow or in constant pursuit of joy, because we have a hope in Christ that is constant and consistent. When we seek to glorify God in everything that we do we are enriched and fulfilled because he is God, and we are not.

[29] This hope is both inspiring and scary. We are inspired to share the love of God that we have come to experience, but our time on this earth is short. We are running out of opportunities to win others for the gospel. There is a wide world of people that are on their way to the end, which is death, and it will lead to the eternal damnation in hell. Christ's return is imminent. As the church we have work to do. As the church we must produce the fruit of glory to God to testify in every circumstance that he is Lord, and he came to save. In the balance of circumstances, we should never miss the opportunity to tell the world that Jesus Christ is King!

Work towards the kingdom. Produce the fruit of his righteousness in every circumstance and share the gospel with all those who are lost!

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

COMMUNION