



Dating at the End of the World

No. 18

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

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Text

[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. [26] I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. [27] Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. [28] But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. [29] This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, [30] and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, [31] and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

[32] I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. [33] But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, [34] and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. [35] I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

[36] 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.

[39] 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.

Introduction:

- Arouse Interest:
 - Right at the beginning of World War II, C.S. Lewis wrote a short speech entitled "Learning in War Time." As a professor at Oxford during this

time, many of Lewis's colleagues would have been wondering what the use of their classes on philosophy, history, and art could be during this difficult season of warfare.

- Lewis wrote this talk with the hopes of persuading his students and colleagues to press on in their academic endeavors, even during this time of war.
- Lewis writes:
 - "What does war do to death? It certainly does not make it more frequent; 100 percent of us die, and the percentage cannot be increased. It puts several deaths earlier, but I hardly suppose that that is what we fear. Certainly, when the moment comes, it will make little difference how many years we have behind us. Does it increase our chances of a painful death? I doubt it. As far as I can find out, what we call natural death is usually preceded by suffering, and a battlefield is one of the very few places where one has a reasonable prospect of dying with no pain at all. Does it decrease our chances of dying at peace with God? I cannot believe it. If active service does not persuade a man to prepare for death, would conceivable concatenation of circumstances? Yet war does do something to death. It forces us to remember it." (Lewis 31).
- Surface Needs:
 - Lewis's essay reminds all of us of the effervescent nature of our lives. It reminds all of us that at any moment you and I could drop dead, and this next minute could truly be our last.
 - In light of the ever-present reality of the end, what are you and I supposed to do with the little time that we have left?
 - This is a question that is particularly relevant for Christians today. For us, we not only believe we could die at any moment, but we're also confronted with the reality that at any moment Jesus Christ our Lord himself could burst onto the scene, flip the tables of life, and usher all of us into the greater eternity of his kingdom forever.
 - The Word of God is very clear on this point in 1 Cor. 15:51:
 - [51] Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, [52] in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.
 - In light of the imminent return of Christ, the Apostle Paul has a very important question to ask the people of God this morning. How are we supposed to date when we know that the end of the world is just around the corner?
- Orient to Text:

- I get why you'd think this is a ridiculous question. But it's the kind of ridiculous question that Paul himself seeks to address here at the end of 1 Corinthians 7.
- As we've seen in our study of 1 Corinthians, Paul is all about adjusting the priorities of the Corinthian Christians in light of the good news of Christ's gospel.
- As we've seen in chapter 7, some Christians have overcorrected in their faith and were advocating a form of spiritual asceticism that Jesus himself never asked for. Some within the Corinthian church were advocating that Christians avoid marriage altogether. Paul clearly doesn't agree with this.
- But at the same time, Paul does agree there is an advantage that single people have to be single-minded in their service to the Lord. This is what Paul addresses here in verses 25-40
- In light of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do, how are we supposed to date in a world like this? Paul's answer to this question is simple: **Christians date with the end in mind.**

Organizational Sentence:

- The structure of this passage this morning is clear, but I had a harder time coming up with memorable titles this time. In verses 25-31, we're gonna talk about a fading world. Then in 32-35, we're gonna talk about a fruitful bachelorhood. Finally, in 36-40, we are going to wrap things up, talking about the freedom to marry.

A Fading World (25-31)

- Paul starts off this next section of his letter in verse 25, stating, "Now concerning the betrothed."
- Whenever Paul uses this phrase "Now concerning," it is very likely that Paul is responding to an explicit concern the Corinthians themselves have written to Paul about (1:11). And here, what differentiates this section from 7:1-16 is that Paul is now turning to talk to those who are not married, but are betrothed to one another. And the question that they are asking Paul is whether or not they should go through with their marriage.
- As we remember from 7:1, there were some in Corinth who thought that any sex, even within the boundaries of marriage, was defiling. This is why Paul spent the majority of 7:1-5 trying to persuade married couples to enjoy the full benefits of marriage.
- But how does Paul address those who are single, or dating, or engaged? Well, here, Paul takes a very different tone and tactic than he originally did with those who are already married. Paul writes:
 - [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.
- Now, real quick, what does Paul mean when he says that he is saying something and not the Lord? Is Paul saying that this next section of verses is not inspired by the Lord?

- Well, when we look earlier at verses 10 and 12, we see that Paul makes a similar distinction when he is talking about divorce. And there, it is clear that when he says the Lord gives commands not to divorce, he's talking about Jesus himself, who clearly prohibited divorce in his teachings (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11, and Luke 16:18).
- But in verse 12, when Paul is addressing those who became Christians after they had already married an unbelieving spouse, Paul states that he himself is giving this command, not the Lord. And it's clear that Paul is saying that Jesus himself did not explicitly teach on the matter they are asking about.
- But just because this command is coming from Paul doesn't mean it is less inspired or less authoritative for the church. Paul himself is very clear in 1 Corinthians 14:37:
 - [37] If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. (ESV)
- A similar thing is going on here in verse 25. Here, Jesus himself didn't explicitly teach on whether single Christians should or should not get married. And Paul is acknowledging that.
- But there is a slight difference in tact here with how Paul is approaching this question. It's not that what he says here isn't inspired by God, but it's not an inspired command. Here, it's more like inspired advice from the Apostle Paul on the matter. More like Proverbs than Deuteronomy.
- And what is Paul's inspired advice when it comes to marriage? Well, it's very similar to last week's passage. Here, Paul instructs the Corinthian church once again to be content right where they are. Paul writes in verse 26:
 - [26] I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. [27] Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. [28] But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. (ESV)
- The translation here is a little weird. We need to remember that Paul is addressing those who are betrothed, not those who are already married. So this should probably be translated, "Are you betrothed to a wife? Do not seek to be free?"¹
- In other words, if you are committed to someone, then you should get married. But if you're not, then you should focus on how to use your singleness for the glory of God.
- Now, when Paul says that the one who marries has not sinned, he's not saying that marriage is some sort of second-class Christian calling. Remember, there were people in Corinth actually claiming that those who marry are sinning, and Paul doesn't agree with that perspective. But at the same time, Paul does see some valid reasons for remaining single in this life.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries VOLUME 7 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), pres.ent.

- Why? Because this present form of the world is fading away. Paul writes in verse 29:
 - [29] This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, [30] and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, [31] and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. (ESV)

Application

- Friends, if you are not a Christian here today, what Paul says here may not make a lot of sense to you. For you, this world is all there is. In the words of the great poet Eminem:
 - Look, if you had one shot or one opportunity
 - To seize everything you ever wanted in one moment
 - Would you capture it or just let it slip?²
- That's the perspective of the world. You get one life. One shot to make your dreams happen. One opportunity for happiness and then it's gone forever.
- And every hope lost, every dream crushed, every tragedy that this life throws at you hits so much harder, because this is the only life that you have.
- But for Christians, we believe that Jesus rose from the dead. We believe that since Jesus rose from the dead, the benefits of his life, death, and resurrection belong to all those who turn from their sins and trust in him. And we believe that one day Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. And those who rejected Christ in this life will be rejected by Christ in the next life. But those who trusted in Christ will be raised from the dead to live with Jesus and his people in a new heaven and a new earth.
- This is what Christians believe. And this radically changes everything we think about the world we are living in today.
 - We can experience the joys of this life without fear of loss.
 - We can mourn the tragedies of life without despair.
 - We can make the most of whatever job, status, or life stage we are in, because we know that this world is not our home.
 - We can enjoy the good things in this life, but still hold them lightly, knowing that there are better things to come.
- Friends, the fading nature of this life should not only change our perspective but also our priorities. One day, you and I will stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account for our lives, and that day is coming far sooner than any of us thinks. The Apostle Peter warns in 2 Peter 3:10 that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, during the times when people will be asking, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

² "Eminem – Lose Yourself Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," n.d., <https://genius.com/821556?>

- Brothers and sisters, in light of this, you and I ought to ask if the priorities of our lives today align with our confession of faith.
- Are we living for the acclaim of the Lord, or are we simply living for the praise of men?
- Are we striving for the salvation of souls, or are we satisfied with worldly symbols of status and acclaim?
- Do we long for the pleasures of God's presence, or are we satisfied with the superficial pleasures of this life?
- One thing you have to give the Apostle Paul credit for, he really believed that Jesus could return at any moment. And the priorities of his life were consistent with his profession of faith. No one could accuse Paul of putting too much stock in a world that is passing away. And in light of the fading nature of this life, Paul addresses those who are single in the church to ask them to consider the benefits of a fruitful bachelorhood.

A Fruitful Bachelorhood (32-35)

- As Paul himself states in verse 28, those who choose to marry have not sinned, but they will have worldly troubles. By worldly troubles, Paul isn't saying sinful troubles, but troubles of this life. Entanglements with a world that we know will one day pass away.
- As Paul states in verse 32:
 - [32] I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. [33] But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, [34] and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. [35] I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. (ESV)
- The fundamental difference between the married Christian and the unmarried appears in verse 34. In Paul's perspective, the married man's interests are divided. On the one hand, he wants to serve the Lord with every part of his being, but on the other hand, he has responsibilities to his wife and his family that hinder him from fully being able to serve as he would like.
- By contrast, the unmarried man is able to freely dedicate his whole being to the service of the Lord. And Paul, a single man himself, simply asks the Christians in Corinth to consider remaining single so that they can better serve the Lord.
- Now we need to qualify what Paul is saying here. As we see clearly in verse 35, this isn't a command from Paul. This is his inspired advice on the matter.
- Paul doesn't think that single people are inherently more holy than those who are married. His perspective on the matter is a lot more pragmatic than that.
- And some of Paul's advice here may be somewhat contextual to the circumstances surrounding Corinth at the time. Many commentators think that the

“worldly troubles” Paul is referring to in verse 28 is actually a reference to some kind of persecution really going on during that time.³ In that light, it makes a lot of sense why Paul might be discouraging marriage right now. This would also make sense of the fact that in 1 Timothy 5:11, Paul actually instructs younger widows to get married. Paul isn’t contradicting himself. He’s giving appropriate advice with respect to their time and circumstances.

Application

- At the same time, having given all of these qualifications, I still think that today we in our Evangelical Baptist circles can grow and do a better job valuing and caring better for single people than we tend to do.

Illustration:

- I don’t know if you know this, but there is a long history of Evangelical men and women who have faithfully served the Lord in extraordinary ways, who have never been married.
- John Stott was an Anglican cleric and evangelist who was one of the most influential Evangelical ministers of his time. He’s one of my personal favorite preachers.
 - In his time, Stott established the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion.
 - He chaired the Church of England Evangelical Council and the National Assembly of Evangelicals.
 - He presided over the United Kingdom Scripture Union and the Evangelical Alliance.
 - And he served as honorary chaplain to Queen Elizabeth II for more than 30 years.
- And for the 90 years of his life, he never married. He dedicated his life to his ministry and served the Lord faithfully until the day he died.
- Amy Carmichael (1867-1951) was a famous missionary to India. In her active years on the field, Carmichael began an orphanage and spent her years rescuing young girls from abuse and abandonment. The Dohnavur Fellowship, which she founded, is said to have rescued approximately 2000 young girls in her lifetime. Carmichael never married.
- Lottie Moon, a missionary in the Southern Baptist Convention, spent 40 years in China on the mission field. Lottie is credited with laying the foundation for international mission support that SBC churches have to this day. To this day, our church participates in an offering in December entitled the Lottie Moon offering, which is specifically used to support mission work around the world. Lottie Moon never married.

Application

- Now what’s the point of mentioning all these people? Friends, if you're single, whether you want to be or not, I just want you to know, you have a very strategic

³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014).

opportunity in your stage of life to do some pretty amazing things for the cause of Christ today.

- I understand that singleness can be incredibly lonely and difficult. And I don't want to downplay that at all. At the same time, we need to view the pain we feel in this life in light of the end that is coming. One day, Jesus is going to return, and when he does, it's not really going to matter whether or not you or I were single in this life. We will be caught up in his heavenly kingdom, enjoying forever the fellowship and love of God himself. And if that's where you and I are headed, eternal happiness forever, then maybe being single right now isn't the worst thing in the world.
- In the meantime, whether or not you get married or not, right now you have an opportunity that you may never get again. Friend, can I challenge you just a little bit here? Don't spend your single years simply wishing to be married. Do something cool with the time God has given you. Ask yourself, if I really entrusted all my gifts, all my desires, all my talents to the Lord, if I really strove to love the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, what could I do for Jesus?
 - Maybe some of you can hone a particular gift that God has given you. Maybe you can take a couple of classes in counseling or biblical theology.
 - Maybe some of you can start planning out the next church missions trip and how to help support our missionaries already in the field. Maybe you could join them in the field one day.
 - Maybe some of you are passionate about caring for the migrant community in the city, or praying for moms considering abortion. Maybe there are ministries in Chicago that you ought to get more involved with.
- I don't know what the Lord has in store for you. But I can tell you this. It would be a real bummer if you one day got married, and you looked back on your time as a single person, and you realized that you could have done a whole lot more for Jesus than you did back then. Friends, if you have the chance to do something cool for Jesus, then go hard for it.
- And when you're lonely and you're missing your family, let the church come around you. Let us know how you're feeling. Let us be the spiritual family you need when you're feeling down.
- By the way, married people, this means that you and I, we gotta do a better job caring for our brothers and sisters who don't have their earthly family around them. And it's hard. I am realizing this more and more each day. I am an introvert. I like being alone with my family.
- But I'm starting to see more and more that there are brothers and sisters in Christ who need me to step up and be the brother that I am called to be. And even though I'm not perfect, I gotta stretch myself a bit to try and care for them. And you gotta do the same.
- One of the things that should never happen at IBC. No one should ever have to spend Thanksgiving or Christmas alone.

- One of the things I've been thinking about when studying this passage is the fact that in 1 Timothy 5, Paul set up a program in the church to care for older widows who faithfully ministered to his people.
- That means, in Paul's mind, for single people to be successful in their service to the Lord, the rest of us here need to support them. To have their backs all the way. Friends, when we grow old, we have the general hope that our children will one day take care of us. But who is going to take care of those who have no children in our church?
- Brothers and Sisters, we need to pray for the single people in our church. We need to pray that God would keep them pure and holy and close to his love and fellowship. And we need to take up the responsibility God has entrusted us to care for those in our body who need their spiritual family these days.
- Alright, so you're here, you're single, hopefully you appreciate a little more the unique strategic place of life you're in to do something for Jesus. At the same time, I know that most of you in here are clearly thinking, "Theo, I get it. Being single isn't the end of the world. But I still really wanna get married." I totally understand that. And Paul understands that too. That's why after talking about a fading world, and a fruitful bachelorhood, he ends this section speaking about the freedom to marry.

The Freedom to Marry (36-40)

- Paul writes, starting at verse 36:
 - [36] 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. (ESV)
- Notice just how much freedom Paul gives Christians to make this decision for themselves. According to Paul, if you're a Christian, and you want to get married, and you have the opportunity to get married, Paul literally says here, you should do what you want.
- If you want to be single. Paul doesn't ask anyone to make any vows of celibacy, but he does ask that we be sure of what we want before we decide to be single for the Lord. In verse 37, Paul goes out of his way to make sure this is a choice, not something done under compulsion.
 - The person needs to be firm in their heart
 - Needs to be under no necessity from others
 - Needs to be able to have self-control
 - And again needs to really want to do this for himself or herself.
- And then at the end, Paul wraps all this up by summarizing his advice on singleness and marriage in verses 39 and 40:

- [39] 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. (ESV)
- This is review for those of us who have been studying 1 Corinthians 7 together. Paul teaches that marriage is for life. And if you get married, you need to take responsibility for your decisions and stick it out for life.
- But if one person dies, the other is free to marry whom they like as long as the person is in the Lord or a Christian.
 - That's an important point. For a Christian, deliberate marriage to an unbeliever is a serious sin. It's a clear sign that your love and loyalty to Christ are nowhere near where it is supposed to be for someone who claims to belong to Jesus.
- But within those parameters, Paul says you are free to marry whomever you like. You are even free to not get married again if you like. It's up to you.

Application

- Now I want to emphasize the freedom Christians have in this matter because as a church I think we need to hear this. If you're a single Christian in our church today, none of us here can tell you exactly whom you should marry.
- I think a lot of Christians in their dating journey are looking for signs of the one. The one person that God has specifically set aside for you to marry. And some Christians tend to think that if you miss that very specific one, you will be unhappy for the rest of your life, because you missed the will of God on this very important matter. Friends, if that were true, we would all be in very serious trouble.
- Now I'm not saying you shouldn't take your choice of a spouse seriously. Obviously, next to becoming a Christian, this is the most important choice you need to make. Next to Jesus, no one else in your life is going to affect you as much as your husband or wife is.
- Having said that, if the apostle Paul couldn't tell you for sure whether or not you were supposed to get married or not, what makes you think that any of us could tell you with certainty whom you should marry or not?
- Friends, I hate to break it to you, but that is just not the way that this works. Paul is very clear here that marriage is your choice, and you need to own it and take responsibility for it.
- Now, there are clearly people you should not marry, and picking a partner for life requires a good deal of wisdom from yourself and from others around you. But at the end of the day, it's still got to be your choice, and if you want to get married, then you need to choose wisely.
- My advice for how to choose wisely here is to date with the end in mind. And I mean this in a couple of different ways. Christian, you should date with the end of your life in mind. You should ask yourself, when you're dying of cancer, and it's gross and painful, who do you want sitting next to you on your deathbed? Is this

- the kind of person that you would want to sit next to and wait with in the final moments of their life?
- You should also date with the end of the world in mind. As Paul has been pressing on our minds this morning, one day this world will fade away. And you and I will be face-to-face with Jesus on judgment day. We'll have to give an account of our lives before the almighty. Friend, is the person that you're dating the kind of person that will help you give a good account before God on judgment day? Is this the kind of person who is more interested in your holiness than their own personal gratification and happiness? Is this the kind of person whose life and mission align with your own life and mission?
 - I'm not saying you need to have all the factors of your life figured out, but if he wants to be a pastor and she doesn't want to be a pastor's wife, that's at least something to consider.
 - If she's a Baptist and he's a Lutheran, you should probably talk about where the two of you are gonna go to church before you entrust this person to take your future kids with them to their church.
 - I'm not saying that any of these are deal breakers, but I am saying that you need to date with the end in mind.
 - And if you're doing this right, dating with the end in mind will also take some of the pressure off of dating as well. After all, with heaven in front of us, none of us needs to find that perfect match who fulfills all the holes in our hearts. We don't need someone to make all our dreams come true. We have Jesus for that, and Jesus is coming soon.
 - And knowing we have infinite joy coming our way on the other side of eternity, friends, you no longer need to keep searching for that perfect spouse who will give you infinite joy now. You can see people for who they are. Good people. Not perfect by any means, but genuinely good. Maybe the kind of good Christian who really loves you and who wants to walk with you through the trials of this life as the two of you walk together towards heaven. Friends, maybe that's enough.
 - One day, Jesus is gonna bust through these clouds and wrap this whole bad boy of history up. And when that day comes, it's not really gonna matter a whole lot whether or not we're single or married. All that's gonna matter is whether or not we belong to Jesus or not. Whether we've spent our lives trusting in the things of this passing world, or whether we've spent our lives trusting in Jesus Christ alone as our sole comfort in life and death.
 - Friends, are you living your life with the end in mind? You ought to be. The end is coming far sooner than you think.