

In Chapter 7, Paul addresses one of the most important questions for all of us. Should we get married at all? If yes, then to whom? When?

The church in Corinth was living through a crisis, and Paul taught them to adopt an eternity mindset, which would help them through it.

The suffering believers had previously asked Paul questions, and here in chapter 7, Paul was writing answers. Back in verse 1, Paul wrote “*now concerning the matters about which you wrote*” and then Paul wrote the first 24 verses to address their first question about relations within marriage, and being content with where God has placed us.

Now continuing here in verse 25, Paul wrote, “*Now concerning the betrothed...*” which was Paul’s way of bringing up the 2nd question from the believers in the church in Corinth. Should engaged couples go ahead and get married or not?

Did you know that for the first time in our history, half of American adults are single? We now have 110 million singles! Change is happening in our culture.

Given our current situation with events, and our current culture, would you advise Christians - to get married or not? In this passage, we see that...

An eternity mindset helps us to see both singleness and marriage as gifts, and not as distractions from serving God.

1. In our present distress (v.26), in our brief time in this world (v.29), and in a world that is passing away (v.31), our eternity mindset changes how we see many important things.

God created a single. But then God said in Genesis 2:18, “it is not good for the man to be alone” and God created a wife for him. God set up marriage as normal.

Yet Paul said everyone should remain as they are. So Paul explained in verse 26, that it was “*in view of the present distress.*” The word distress means severe pressures. These are external circumstances which bring relentless constraints and hardships. Sound familiar? Present distress could describe our situation today - a pandemic with constraints, clashes, riots, divisions, and unrest.

In the ancient city of Corinth, the problem was likely a lack of food. Paul revealed four chapters later, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, that some people were hungry as they came to the Lord’s Supper, and tried to turn it into a sustaining meal.

So, the question in chapter 7 is now in context - during a critical shortage of food, should engaged couples go ahead and get married or not? Paul’s short answer was a temporary word of advice to not have weddings. But more needed to be

written. In the ancient world, engagement or betrothal was nearly equivalent to marriage. To call off a wedding was like a divorce. What about the promises of the betrothed? Paul addressed that further, in verse 27, where he unwrapped more wisdom to say that engaged couples need not split up and end their engagements, but rather they could stay engaged and simply delay their weddings. Paul went on to advise that those who were not in engagements any longer – perhaps because one fiancé broke it off or one fiancé had died, were better off after that, not to establish any new engagements going forward.

Paul is clear that he is giving advice, not a command. In the second letter to the same Christians, over in 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul showed the need for “*great endurance in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger...*” More calamities came for the ancient world. Out of love, the Apostle Paul sought to prepare his brothers for all of it. Whenever we face trouble of famine, war, persecutions, wisdom says it is better not to marry.

Even though Paul figured that having a wedding during their food crisis was not advisable, he still conceded in verse 28 that it was not wrong for engaged couples to go through with their wedding. However, the new couple should open their eyes and remain fully aware that they could be facing extra troubles in the flesh or in the body because of the ‘*present distress.*’ Yes, spouses are partners for life, not hindrances and burdens. Yes, they ought to be better together as a team. However, in a time when food was scarce, it could become even more difficult because marriage leads to children, therefore, they could be adding more mouths to feed. Paul’s love for them propelled him to write because Paul wished to “*spare you that*” trouble. (v.28)

In general, Paul’s words were sensitive to the shortage of food and their practical needs, yet Paul allowed them space to follow God’s call in these matters on a case by case basis. The wise conclusion for one engaged couple to postpone their wedding, might not be the same conclusion for another couple who would decide that it is better to go ahead with their wedding.

How to decide? An eternity mindset. Basically, we view singleness and marriage from God’s perspective. Paul shows that there is a bigger mindset that Christians adopt that helps us to handle our choices and freedoms in a wise way.

Just as Paul also wrote to believers in another city, in Colossians 3:2, “*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*” That is an eternity mindset. Keeping in mind more than just whatever is happening right now in our lives, and whatever is in the news reports.

What changes with an eternity mindset? What looks different? A lot! Paul lists some things in verses 29, 30 and 31. Paul wrote that this present world is passing away. Because of that, it impacts the most important things we have. Relationships, losses, happiness, possessions, and culture. Paul shows that issues

of eternity have more of a bearing on our decisions in this world than we at first consider. If all we think of is ‘family values,’ we are still thinking only in this world. If we think eternity, then that sets our ‘family values’ into proper context for Christians.

An eternity mindset knows that we have a very short time (v.29), and that the world is passing away. (v. 31). Because the time is short, what should that mean for your life?

What aspects of our lives are touched?

a) relationships (v.29) Because the time is short, eternity is important, those who have spouses should live as though they had no spouses.

b) losses (v.30) Eternity has an impact on grief. We should mourn as though we were not mourning and grieving.

c) happiness (v.30) Eternity mindset has an impact on happiness. Those who rejoice should live as though we were not rejoicing.

d) possessions (v.30) Keeping in mind an eternal perspective changes how we view our possessions. Those who buy things, should look at those goods as though they had no goods.

d) culture (v.31) Our future in heaven shapes how we view things now where we move and exist – dealing with the world, as if we had no dealings with it. That is culture. What priorities culture has, which

Living in this culture, using the things of the culture, but not engrossed in this culture.

The places we go ought to be different than the parties of the world. The preoccupation of those in the culture is different from the Christian mindset.

What is your view of ownership of money, funds, home, car, clothes, tools, equipment and toys?

Do we have any thoughts of heaven? Do we remember how briefly we are here? When we buy something, we know it is not ours to keep.

Christ came and died and rose, to give us true joy.

What do you think makes you happy? What would our culture say? What does a Christian mindset say?

Think of the happiness you had on your graduation day, or on your wedding day, or on a promotion day, or receiving an inheritance, or when we retire, or when we have a grandchild. The happiness we feel in those days, in comparison to the happiness that is coming for us in heaven, we should act here as if we were not even happy about things on earth at all.

This is why worship is so important. In the time that we meet with God, it is here that God opens His Word and with His Spirit gives us a glimpse of eternity, which puts everything else in order and in its proper place.

See how tied to earth we are? See how the commercials and songs of our

culture have influenced us with the American culture's view of relationships and intimacy and possessions and happiness and culture and death? Does the culture have us in its mindset, instead of the heavenly mindset? Paul wanted the church in Corinth to cast aside the worldly values which led to divisions, arrogance, and confusion. Adopting the eternal perspective would help them right away with the current crisis.

Ask yourself this when you look at the crisis - what aspect of it stresses you out? What things makes you happy? What losses make you sad enough to cry? What makes you fearful or angry? Is it only things of this world? Paul brings in eternity to help them with the simple question of whether engaged couples getting married. But eternity informs that, too, because eternity informs everything. Which leads us to our second point.

2. If you get married, could you maintain the Lord and His work as a higher priority than your marriage/family? (v.32-35)

Verse 32 contains another reason to remain unmarried – because unmarried people have less things to be concerned about. Just one thing – God. Verse 33 shows a man who has concern for the things of God, and Verse 33 shows that that same man is married, and so he also has concern for his wife. Paul shows that man is being pulled in two directions. That does not mean a spouse is going against God. It simply a matter of schedule, focus, time and energy.

Simple example – married people face schedule dilemmas - shall we attend that church function or should we stay home and do what was needed at home? The single person is more available than the married person. That is all. Can a married person go off on a mission trip for 5 weeks with a spouse and children at home? Can you agree to kingdom project or a lot of committees that are going to take most of your evenings for 10 months? The larger point of verses 32-33 is clear - that a single person has less things to be concerned about than a married person. We could say that a single person is being pulled in 1 direction – toward God, and the married person is being pulled in 2 directions – God and also spouse.

In verse 34 Paul made the same point for single women and married women. The only advantage for the single, is that she is less distracted, meaning that she is less split between the cares of God and the cares of her husband. It is not that singleness is more holy or more pure inherently, but rather in looking at her overall schedule, the single woman comparatively has an unfettered devotion to God, and the married woman is split between her devotion to God and her devotion to spouse, split between her concern for the things of God and her concern for her husband.

If you put it on a schedule or a balance sheet, you would admit that Christian spouses do enhance or encourage each other's devotion to the Lord. However,

from the accuracy of our schedule or balance sheet would also emerge the truth that distractions are generated by family responsibilities. It is pro and con. It is benefits and detractions. It is enhancements and distractions. Paul only wants us to admit that there do exist distractions.

Moving to verse 35, we see Paul writing that he is not writing this reality in order to restrain Christians, but rather Paul is writing to encourage all Christians not to lose our undivided devotion to the Lord. The words in verse 35 are this, “*I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you...*”

Since Paul is benefiting us, and this is a gift, then where is the gain? At the end of verse 35. “not to lay any restraint upon your, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.”

Who should have good order? Everyone!

Who should secure your undivided devotion to the Lord? Just singles? No, everyone.

Paul says I want you all to have undivided devotion to the Lord.

I have a chart for you.

On the right, I have a list of priorities, that we ordinarily think of – God first, family second, God’s church/kingdom third, your Job/work/school fourth, and other things are fifth. That seems right to us. But Paul is challenging that. That has been the issue all through this passage. If you are asking whether engaged people should go through with the wedding, what is the priority system that will answer that? If you have the priority system on the right, you will say yes, go ahead and get married. And if you have that priority system, you might be uncomfortable with Paul’s advice in this chapter. Because Paul gives a different set of priorities. It is contained in the chart on the left. The person who has an undivided devotion to the Lord puts God first, second is the work of God, the church/kingdom, and third is family, fourth is your job/work/school, and fifth is other things. The difference Paul brings us here is that the eternity mindset puts God’s work back where it belongs – right up there with God.

Is family an idol for us American Christians?

How many families stay away from the worship of God, because Sunday is family time?

Priorities Devoted to God

God

God’s Church/Kingdom

Family

Job/Work/School

Other

Divided Interests

God

Family

God’s Church/Kingdom

Job/Work/School

Other

When wondering about getting married, a person does well to ask, “In which

status could I better be devoted to the Lord?"

To the engaged person, Paul asks - if you were to remain single, could you be single without being distracted all the time, perhaps by longing for companionship?

To the engaged person, Paul asks - if you were to go ahead and get married, could you be married and serve the Lord without being sidelined away from serving the Lord at all because of your decision to get married? Could you keep the fires of the eternity mindset burning so hot, that you could in some ways think and act as if you do not have a spouse?

The goal for a Christian is undivided devotion to the Lord.

Sometimes, Christians hide behind their marriage, and don't do anything for God and His church. The reason? My family needs me.

Sometimes, Christians hide behind their singleness, and don't do anything for God and His church. I am pursuing my career or my hobbies.

Sometimes, Christians get distracted by their marriages or their singleness, and lose some devotion to God.

3. Marry or not? Make the best decision that you can in the Lord, and then continue being devoted to the Lord and His work. (v.36-40)

In their time of crisis in Corinth, Paul answered clearly in verse 36, the engaged do not think it is treating someone right to put off a wedding, they can go ahead and get married or, in verse 37, they could stay engaged and postpone the wedding. In verse 38, Paul admits it might be better, practically speaking, to refrain from marriage(v.38), but through it all you are free to make your own choices as Christian adults. In verse 39, if the fiancé or spouse dies, you can re-marry, but it must be a Christian. In verse 40, again, Paul believes you would be happier to stay as you are.

How does this ancient passage in the second half of chapter 7 help Christians living in our culture? Paul is very clear with principles that both singleness and marriage are legitimate for Christians, both are sponsored by special giftedness from God, and both are blessed by God. Just like in Deuteronomy 28:3, Moses showed that God will bless you if you live in the city or the country, so also here in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul shows that God will bless you if you are single or if you are married.

Both singleness and marriage are good. So, it is normal that we all feel conflicted about this topic. We can all see the values of marriage, and we can all agree on the dangers and discomforts of marriage. We can all see the value of singleness, and we can all agree on the dangers and discomforts of singleness.

We have freedom to get married, and freedom not to get married.

The culture in America used to elevate marriage, but now it is changing and

is elevating singleness. In the culture in which we live, singleness is becoming a sign of social success. Those of you who are younger probably are feeling pressure in two directions - your parents and grandparents apply mild pressure for you to get married, but in the other direction, your friends apply mild pressure you to stay single. Why? Because the culture shift now presents that single people who have a career, a home and a fulfilled life, are seen as liberated from the previous overly-traditional set of values.

The same thing was happening in Corinth! The wider culture of Paul's day said to get married, but the city of Corinth said don't get married. The city said getting married gets in the way of personal aspirations. So, the Christians to whom Paul is writing so carefully, were being pulled in two directions at the same time – one group was pulling them to get married, and the other group was pulling them to stay single. How does Paul help them with this? Paul writes that they should not succumb to the social pressures in either direction. That would be making your decision based on what others say or think. That is not a good way to decide anything! Look at verse 37, “*Whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart...he will do well.*” Under no necessity of pleasing your extended family members. Under no necessity to please your friends. Freedom from these pressures. Great!

But you also need freedom from your own voracious desires that could lead you astray. In our same verse 37, Paul writes that as Christians, we have to get our desires under control. If you are staying single because your desire is to focus on your career, or because you were burned and hurt before and you desire no more pain, or because you desire never to be supremely obligated to one person, or you desire not to miss that someone better who might be coming along later, none of those are good reasons. Those are your desires, which are out of control and dominating you. Your goal is to get what you want. Your desires are ruling you.

How about bad reasons to get married? If you are getting married because you cannot stand the thought of being alone, and when you spend time alone, then you get confused, you will crush your spouse with that baggage. Why? Because your desires are out of control. You want to be with someone, but you are not even stable and healthy yourself yet. A spouse does not fix those internal desires for personal clarity and focus. A husband or wife does not give you all of that. Who does?

Paul says in verse 40 who gives Paul clarity and focus. “*The Spirit of God.*”

The answer for Paul was not Paul himself being healthy and well-adjusted. The answer for Paul was not finding and marrying Mrs. Paul the Apostle. He did get married, but she was not the one who put him all together. The answer for Paul was not remaining “ Paul the Loner”. The answer was finding a freedom that was

better than singleness, and finding a love that was better than marriage. Even in the ancient world, Paul recognized idols. Singleness, when it becomes an idol, promises to give you all that you want, but singleness cannot do it. It has become an idol. Marriage, when it becomes an idol, marriage promises to give you all that you want, but marriage cannot do it. It has become an idol.

Paul found the gospel. Paul worshipped Christ, who died and rose again, and sent the Spirit of God upon every Christian. Paul is recommending the Spirit of God to you, to put you all together. You can recognize the culture, and stand up to it, with the strength of the Spirit of God. You can recognize the pressures of your family and friends, and withstand it with the Spirit of Christ. You can recognize the danger of idols developing in your own heart, and you can defend yourself against them with the insights of the Spirit of God using the Word of God.

Singleness is good, but it is not everything. Marriage is good, but it is not everything. If you try to get everything, you will be disappointed. But Paul says that when you have Christ, that Christ by His Spirit, never lets you down.

The eternity mindset is the gospel of Christ, and its implications for you and your life. The gospel prevents you from worshipping self or spouse or operating on fear of people or being brainwashed by the culture.

Conclusion:

So, the takeaway today is this: as we keep in mind eternity when we look at our marital status, we stop making singleness so important or being married such a demand. We let everyone we know feel the relief by telling them that we are truly and genuinely content. When we have the eternity mindset, we can love our family, our friends, and our neighbors. Why? Because whether we are married or single, we have come to know a greater love that frees us to live for eternity while in this world.

Some of you are single and your strongest desire is to be married. I wish that I could tell you your day is coming, but I don't know that. I am concerned about the nearness of an idol in your heart. So, instead of desiring to be married, I offer you something better. You can be satisfied, whether solo or with a spouse. You can have something better than both. You can have a love that will never let you go through all eternity. You can have a love that will never let you down. Turn to Christ and ask for the Spirit of God to live in you and to reduce your desires for this world, in the light of eternity.

Some of you are single and you fear marriage. Losing your freedom. Missing out on gatherings of singles. Being disappointed in married life. Being hurt in the past, and now suspicious of other. Or, you are terrified of becoming fully known and then rejected. But as a Christian, God calls you to remember that

there is a lover who would never reject you. With Christ as your God and closest love, there is no losing out or missing out or being disappointed or being rejected or neglected.

To both singles and married people, we must remember that romantic love does not save. Marital love does not redeem, and it does not fulfill our souls. Dating, engaged, married relationships cannot bring the deep and abiding happiness that we crave. Nor can singleness. Some people love living solo, because it allows them to do whatever they want, whenever they want. But that is a false god, too. Flying solo cannot give you everything you are looking for, everything you need, and answer all of your questions. The gift of singleness was never meant to do that, nor was the gift of marriage. They were never meant to be gods, but gifts.

Isaiah 57:15, “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”