

Marriage is under attack in America, and singleness is on the rise, so it is good that we study this together.

Here in Chapter 7, Paul addressed one of the biggest questions of life. Should you get married? If yes, then to whom? When?

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 two matters about intimacy 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. Since there was a crisis in the ancient world, should engaged couples go ahead and get married or not?

We could ask the same question today. Let me start by asking it this way - if you had two friends in Ukraine who were dating each other, would you advise them to get married during the war?

The church in Corinth was living through a crisis, and Paul taught them the importance of an eternity mindset.

Change is happening in our modern culture. For the first time in our history as a nation, half of American adults are single. We now have 110 million singles!

Given our current situation with events, and our current culture, would we advise Christians - to date, get engaged and get married or not? In this passage, we see that...**An eternity mindset helps us to see 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:**

God created a single man. God formed one single man from the dust, and then God breathed life into him. But then God said in Genesis 2:18, “*it is not good for the man to be alone*” and then God created a wife for him. So, from the very beginning, God set up singleness as not good and marriage as good and normal.

Yet here in our passage, Paul said each single should remain as he is. Paul explained in verse 26, that his advice was “*in view of the present distress.*” The word distress referred to severe pressures. External circumstances brought relentless constraints and hardships. Sound familiar? Present distress could describe our situation today – our culture’s anger and violence are increasing.

In the ancient city of Corinth, the distress was a lack of food. As evidence, we know that Paul revealed 4 chapters later, in 1 Cor. ch. 11, that some people were coming hungry to the Lord’s Supper, and trying to turn it into a sustaining meal.

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. In the ancient world, engagement or betrothal was nearly equivalent to marriage. To call off a wedding was just like a divorce. Paul addressed that further, in verse 27, where he wrote 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 had died - should not seek a new engagement.

Paul was clear from verse 25, that he was giving a viewpoint, not a command. Later, even more calamities came to their city. Later in 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul showed the need for “*great endurance in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger...*” When they faced troubles, Paul's advice was to postpone weddings.

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 a wedding. However, the new couple should know that they could be facing extra troubles because of the ‘*present distress.*’ Marriage leads to children, which would increase the young family's need for food. Since Paul loved them, Paul wished to spare them that trouble.

Paul had given general advice, but knew that decisions were made on a case by case basis. While a wise conclusion for one engaged couple to postpone their wedding, while another couple might be wise to go ahead with a wedding.

How to decide? Answer: an eternity mindset. Basically, they were to view both singleness and marriage from God's perspective. Paul showed that there is a bigger mindset that Christians should adopt that to handle choices in a wise way.

What is gained with an eternity mindset? For starters, Paul wrote that this present world is passing away. Because of that, there is impact on the most important things in life. Relationships, losses, happiness, possessions, and culture. Paul showed that issues of eternity have more of a bearing on our decisions in this world than we might have thought.

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. Because time is so short, we should mourn as though we did not have plenty of time for mourning and grieving.
- c) happiness (v.30) Eternity mindset has an impact on happiness. Those who rejoice should live as though we were not focused on rejoicing.
- d) possessions (v.30) Keeping in mind an eternal perspective changes how we view

our possessions. Those who buy things, should look at our possessions as though they had no possessions.

d) culture (v.31) Our future in heaven shapes how we view things now where we live – we are dealing with the world, as if we had no dealings with it. Living in this world, using the things of this world, but not engrossed in this world.

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 again, in order to give us true joy.

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.

## **2. A married Christian must balance devotion to spouse/family and devotion to The Lord. (v.32-35)**

Verse 32 contains another reason to remain unmarried – because unmarried Christians only one thing to be concerned about – the Lord! Verse 32 showed a Christian man who had concern for the Lord, and verse 33-34 showed that a Christian man who was married, had a concern for the Lord and also had concern for his wife. Paul showed that man was being pulled in two directions. That does not mean his wife was fighting against God. It was simply a matter of focus, time, energy, and schedule.

Take a simple example – married people face schedule dilemmas - shall we attend that church function or should we stay home and do what was needed to take care of the children and the house? The single person is more available than the married person. That is the only simple truth Paul is referencing here. Who is more available - a single person or a person married with children - to go on a mission trip for 5 weeks? Is a married person equally available for a kingdom project? That is the real situation about which Paul was writing.

In verse 34 Paul continued and made the same point for single women and married women. Considering her overall schedule, the single woman had an unfettered devotion to God, and the married woman was 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.

Christian spouses also enhance or encourage each other's devotion to the Lord. It is pros and cons. 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 Paul was not writing this reality in order to restrain Christians, but rather Paul was 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 your, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.”*

Who should have good order? Everyone!

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

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

What are the priorities that American Christians 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 was challenging that. Since they were asking whether engaged people should go through with the wedding, what priority system answered that? If you have the typical American Christians priority system, you will say yes, go ahead and get married.

Paul gave a different set of priorities. 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 brought us here was that the eternity mindset puts God’s work back where it belongs – right up there with God.

Is marriage and family a competing idol for us American Christians?

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

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 excuse? My family needs me.

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

**3. As Christians approach the decision to marry, we make the best decision that we can in the Lord, and continue being devoted to the Lord and His work. (v.36-40)**

Paul taught clearly in verse 36, the engaged could get married or, in verse 37, they could stay engaged and postpone the wedding. In verse 38, Paul admitted it seemed better to refrain from marriage (v.38), but through it all they were free to make their own choices as Christian adults. In verse 39, if the fiancé or spouse died, they could re-marry. In verse 40, again, Paul believed they would be happier to stay as they were.

How does this ancient passage in the second half of chapter 7 help Christians living in our culture?

Paul was 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. God will bless you if you are single or if you are married.

Both singleness and marriage are good. So, it is normal that some people feel pulled in two directions about this topic. We can agree the values of marriage,

and we can agree on the dangers and discomforts of marriage. We can agree on the value of singleness, and we can 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 who are younger probably are feeling pressure in two directions - parents and grandparents apply mild pressure to get married, but in the other direction, young friends apply mild pressure 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 culture said getting married gets in the way of personal aspirations. So, the Christians to whom Paul was 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 did Paul help them with this? Paul wrote that they should not succumb to the social pressures in either direction. That would be making a decision based on what others say or think. That is not a good way for Christians to decide. 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 extended family members. Under no necessity to please friends. Freedom from these pressures.

But you also need freedom from your own voracious desires that could lead you astray. In verse 37, Paul wrote that Christians have to get 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 to avoid 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 desires, which are out of control and steering 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 would crush a spouse with that baggage. Why? Same problem - 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 would not fix those internal desires for personal clarity and focus. A husband or wife would not give you all of that. Who does give you all of that?

Paul says in verse 40 that it is "*The Spirit of God*" who gives Paul clear

thinking and a right focus, and it is the same gospel answer for all Christians.

The answer for Paul was not Paul himself becoming more 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 for Paul 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 became an idol, promised 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.

The answer Paul was the gospel. Paul worshipped Christ, who died and rose again, and sent the Spirit of God upon every Christian. Paul was recommending the Spirit of God, to put Christians all back together. We can recognize the culture, and stand up to it, with the strength of the Spirit of God. We can recognize the pressures of family and friends, and withstand it with the Spirit of Christ. We can recognize the danger of idols developing in our own hearts, and we can defend 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 we try to get everything, we will be disappointed. But Paul says that when we have Christ, that the result is Christ by His Spirit, never lets us down.

The eternity mindset is the gospel of Christ, and its implications for us and our lives. The gospel prevents us from worshipping self or spouse or operating on fear of people or being carried away by the falsehoods in the culture.

### **Conclusion:**

The takeaway is this: an eternity mindset from Christ by faith, prevents either singleness or marriage from being so important or such a demand fulfill all of our dreams. With the eternity mindset, we are truly and genuinely content.

Some of you are single and your strongest desire is to be married. Instead of desiring to be married to be fulfilled, Christ offers you something better. You can be truly fulfilled, with or without a spouse. You have something better that either. You have a love that will never let you go through all eternity. You 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. You are terrified of becoming fully known and then rejected. 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 us and fulfill our dreams. Marital love does not redeem, and it does

not fulfill our deepest longings. Flying solo cannot give you everything you are looking for, everything you need, and answer all of your questions. The gift of singleness and the gift of marriage 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.”*