

Singleness and Dating

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 February 2018

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 0 0] Several years ago, the New York Times ran an article, Unmarried Pastor Seeking a Job Sees Bias. It chronicled the lives of several single evangelical pastors who struggled to find employment.

And it noted several reasons for this, and one of them was that churches often have unspoken expectations for the pastor's family members. So, for example, expecting the pastor's wife to be an unpaid employee who plays the piano for the church and runs the children's ministry.

So that would obviously be an advantage for a married pastor. So that's one reason it noted. But the most reasons that it noted are what it called, quote, irrational fears.

That a single pastor cannot counsel a mostly married flock. That he might sow turmoil by flirting with a church member. Or that he might be gay. So those are the reasons they quoted for why churches were afraid to hire a single pastor.

And this article probably overplays the so-called bias a little bit. But nevertheless, I think it points to a real discomfort that there is with singleness in churches.

[1 : 1 5] And frequently, there's an assumption in churches that singles want to get married. If you're single, you must want to get married. And then an expectation that if they have the opportunity that they will get married.

And a presumption that if they don't get married before a reasonable age, that there is something deficient about them. You guys have probably, some of you have probably experienced this. And this unfortunate situation stems from an unbiblical view of singleness and marriage.

And it's a significant deviation, actually, from the way the church has historically treated these issues and treated singles. And so this passage offers a much-needed corrective here in 1 Corinthians 7, 25-40, where Paul teaches us that singleness is a blessing from God in which we can please the Lord.

And the main three points that I want to highlight is verses 25-28. It talks about the principle of singleness. And verses 29-35 about the rationale for singleness. And then verses 36-40 about the exception to singleness.

So principle, rationale, and exception. And Paul begins this passage with the phrase in verse 25, Now concerning the betrothed, which is a helpful marker to indicate a new topic, because this is now the second time Paul has used this phrase.

[2 : 3 2] He said earlier in chapter 7, verse 1, Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. And then he proceeded to deal with the issue of sexual relations within marriage and about whether or not married Christians get divorced so that they could avoid the sexual temptation and have practiced abstinence.

And Paul's response on both counts was no, that people who are married should give each other their conjugal rights and that people who are married should stay married and not divorce. So in that section when he said, Now concerning such and such, he addressed that matter in that passage.

And now he's turning to the issue of singles. In instance, Paul says betrothed, which literally means virgins. And it specifically refers to singles who are engaged, basically have someone in their life that they're about to get married.

And remember that the Corinthians, just remember the Corinthian context, that they had an unbiblically low view of the body. So some of the Corinthians were saying that it doesn't matter what you do with your body, so do whatever you want with it.

Go commit sexual immorality. That's fine. And the other part, other segment of the Corinthians believers were saying, Well, since the body doesn't matter at all, we shouldn't have anything to do with it.

[3 : 46] Don't have any sex. Don't even have sex in marriage. Get divorced so that you don't have to be tempted to it. So that's the kind of view that the Corinthians had. And it seems from the context of this passage that some of the people in some of these factions in the Corinthian church were pressuring people, singles who were engaged, to not marry.

Saying, Well, you're engaged. Well, you shouldn't marry because then you're going to have to have these things to do with the body, have sexual relations. That's not good. It doesn't tend to spiritual things. So you should stay betrothed.

You should not marry. So they're applying those kind of pressures to them. And even it seems from verse 28 and verse 36 that they were calling it sinful to marry.

If you're single, you're not married yet. You shouldn't marry because to do so is sinful. And so Paul seems to hear explicitly and forcefully and repeatedly denies that, saying that it is not sinful for a betrothed person to go through with the marriage.

And so that's really the issue he's turning to when he says, Now concerning the betrothed, he's addressing singles or engaged singles particularly. And he continues in verse 25.

[4 : 52] 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. So earlier in chapter 7, 12 to 13, Paul said, To the rest I say, parentheses, I, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. So the reason why Paul added that qualification, I, not the Lord, in that instance, was not to diminish the authoritativeness of his teaching by saying, Oh, this is just my personal opinion, but to indicate that he wasn't relaying a direct teaching of the Lord Jesus as he was doing earlier when he was talking about how Christian couples should not divorce and that even if they do, that they should not remarry.

So he'd say in that case, he was relaying a direct teaching of the Lord, but on this case, he was not. So he says, I, not the Lord, right? So he's kind of doing a similar thing here when he says that I don't have a command from the Lord, I don't have a direct teaching from Jesus, but I do give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy, right?

This is not just a throwaway opinion. This is his judgment that the Corinthians asked for, his apostolic judgment, his judgment inspired by the Spirit, and he's saying, this is my judgment as someone who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy and he's about to tell us what his judgment is.

And it's amazing how he puts that, right? So it's by the Lord's mercy that he's trustworthy, that he can say anything that's trustworthy to these people. It's because of the Lord's mercy, not because of his intrinsic merit or quality.

[6 : 31] So that's Paul, because of God's mercy is trustworthy and now he's gonna give us his judgment in verses 26 to 27. Read that with me. I think that in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is.

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife, right? So this is where we find the principle of singleness for the betrothed.

Those who are single should remain as they are. And it's really the counterpart that mirrors what he said earlier, that those who are married should stay married. Now he's saying those who are single should stay single.

And Paul offers a brief preview of his rationale for it when he says, in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is.

So the word that's translated distress here literally means compulsion or a necessity. It's the exact same word that is translated in verse 37 of the same chapter as necessity.

[7 : 32] So when it says, 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.

So that's the same word. So it refers to a situation that brings some kind of compelling force to it. So a situation that we cannot escape, therefore with which we must cope because we can't leave it.

So we might translate it to present exigencies or the current pressing situation. So because of the current pressing situation, those who are single should remain as they are.

And the word present offers us another clue as to the intended meaning of the word distress. It's a distress, a necessity, a present situation that characterizes the present, the time we're in now.

And in verse 28, Paul says, 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.

[8 : 32] And I would spare you that, right? The phrase worldly troubles is in the Greek, literally the troubles of the flesh and refers to the anxieties and the stresses that married people experience by virtue of their fleshly and worldly existence here and now, right?

So in light of these present pressing situations, in light of our present existence in the flesh, in this world, it is good for a person to remain as he is.

Or as the Bible commentator, Leon Morris puts it, when high seas are raging, it is no time for changing ships. That's basically what Paul's saying.

As Paul says later in verse 31, the present form of this world is passing away. So there's no reason then to make such a big deal of marriage or singleness as if those things determined our ability to serve God and follow him.

Paul's principle is essentially the same as what he taught in the previous passage, namely that we can fulfill our Christian calling no matter what condition we're in, no matter what situation we're in. Whether we're circumcised or uncircumcised, whether we're free or enslaved.

[9 : 39] So likewise here, Paul says in verse 27, are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. Because this present distress characterizes the lives of all believers who live between two worlds.

Because it characterizes this present passing world, we shouldn't be so invested in these things. Now we can remain as we are. So that's the principle that those who are not yet married are to live by.

It is good for a person to remain as he is. It's good to remain single. So on this point, Paul agrees with the Corinthians. But his enforcement of it is different because he says it's not sinful to marry while the Corinthians are saying that it's sinful to marry.

And Paul's theological reason for this principle is different. But the principle that it's good to remain as they are is the same. But Paul is aware of the Corinthian tendency, as I mentioned, to really codify this principle, this general rule into a law that everybody has to observe.

So Paul adds a sharp qualification in verse 28. He says, But if you do marry, you have not sinned. And if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned.

[10 : 55] Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. While it is good for a single man or woman to remain single, it is decidedly not sinful for him or her to marry.

Then Paul adds the reason why he is really encouraging singleness, and that he says, And that serves really as the transition to verses 29 to 35, where Paul offers us the rationale for singleness.

So let's turn to that. He says in verse 29, That's helpful, right? So if what he said up to this point has been confusing to you, Paul is about to explain it to us.

This is what I mean, brothers. Verses 25 to 28. In view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain in years. That's what he is explaining now. Those who marry will have worldly troubles. What does that mean? That's what he is explaining now.

And this is his rationale. The appointed time has grown very short. The appointed time refers to the second coming of Christ, and the day of judgment.

[11 : 55] And Paul is saying that the appointed time is imminent. Paul also speaks of this in Acts 17, 32-31. He says, The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. So the end of the world as we know it is imminent. Not in the sense that the hourglass is about to run out of sand necessarily, but in the sense that the hourglass has been turned over and that the clock is ticking.

Our life here, we're on the clock now. The appointed time is impending, and it's making unavoidable progress toward its fulfillment. If you think about it this way, it's impending in a similar way that our death is impending.

I mean, our death is imminent, right? Sorry to break it to you, but the death, not in the sense that you're about to die tomorrow or next week, but that death is surely coming. And in light of the context of history and about our life, it's really, really short.

Time is short, and our death is coming, and we have to live in light of it. And that's what Paul is telling us here, that it's fast approaching. The finish line is now visible. The end is in sight, because the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ has signaled, has marked, has fixed the end of the age.

[13 : 21] It's the beginning of the end of the age. And because of that, Paul says, the appointed time has grown very short. And then in verses 30 to 31, Paul offers us a series of examples that illustrate the application of this principle.

Read with me. I just noticed the light flickering, but I don't want you guys to ignore it.

Think of it as it's nearing the end of the age, and this is what this passage is all about. And now, in this principle, so he's illustrating, so it'd be a mistake if we took these illustrations that he gave us here and applied it literally, because that would be, that would mean that husbands who have wives should ignore their wives, neglect them, and live like their wives don't exist, right?

That would mean that you're really sad and you're mourning, and then you act like you're not sad, you're not mourning, right? I mean, that's not what Paul is saying. He's not saying when you own things, you purchase, don't act like you don't have them, don't use them.

That's not what Paul is saying. These illustrations are here to demonstrate a principle, to demonstrate a point that he wants to make, because, in fact, if you applied it literally, it would directly contradict what he just said.

[14 : 54] He said, let those, when he says, let those who have wives live as though they had none, right, if that would directly, if we did that literally, that would directly contradict what he said in the preceding passage when he gave, told husbands and wives to give each other their conjugal rights.

And not only that, he says in the following section that the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife. That's how a married man should be, anxious to please his wife.

And so Paul's not saying, live as if you don't have your spouses. It's not supposed to be pressed into literal detail, but rather the principle that he's asserting is this, since Christians have been time stamped with eternity, we should not accord ultimate significance to worldly things that have expiration dates on them.

Marriage has an expiration date on it. So don't act as if that marriage is what defines you and gives you ultimate significance and meaning. Live as if that's from, that ultimate significance comes from the Lord alone.

Like it's, you would, if you knew that you had one year left to live because you have terminal cancer, I mean, you would undoubtedly live differently, right? Christians who have seen the last day live with clarity, live today with urgency, right?

[16 : 07] We're to live this day in light of that day. That's what Paul is trying to teach us. That doesn't mean we seek to escape the world or detach ourselves from the world. We still marry, we still mourn, we still rejoice, we still buy things, and we still deal with the world like the rest of humanity, but we must not give ultimate significance to these things.

We deal with the world, but we're not defined by it as people who are in the world, but not of it. We live with awareness of the present distress, the present exigencies that characterize life between two worlds.

So that means whether we are circumcised or uncircumcised, whether free or enslaved, whether we are single or married, we are to remain as we are and live as if we are not.

That means if you're married, you shouldn't look to your husband or wife for your ultimate sense of self-worth and fulfillment. That means if you're single, you shouldn't be desperate for a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a husband or a wife as if he or she can be your savior and imbue your life with meaning and significance.

If we look to men for such fulfillment, we will invariably be disappointed. We are people who are defined by our heavenward call, not by our earthly circumstances.

[17 : 30] Only God can provide ultimate meaning. Only God can provide eternal security and that's Paul's rationale for why singles should remain singles. For the present form of this world is passing away.

And then in verses 32-34, he provides a little more detail. He says, I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 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.

So Paul's not here speaking about sinful anxiety because he's saying that the unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. So that's not sinful. It's the way it should be.

It's a good thing to be anxious about the things of the Lord and wanting to please him. So he's not talking about sinful anxiety, but a proper concern that we ought to have with things regarding which we will be accountable to God.

[18 : 36] And the truth of the matter is the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife. And his interests are divided. And the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.

If you are married and you're not anxious about how to please your wife or please your husband, then you're not living in marriage as you should be. You should be anxious about those things. And this is the reality.

For this reason, Paul wants those who can remain single to do so in order that they might be free from these particular anxieties that attend to marriage. And here, notice that Paul separately addresses the unmarried and the betrothed.

So that confirms our early interpretation from the preceding passage that the unmarried people refer to demarried people. So people who are now single but who were once married. And the betrothed are people who were never married.

So they've been their virgins. And so he's addressing both here. And in view of the present distress, the things of this world can easily entangle us.

[19 : 40] And when we get married, these worldly troubles are compounded because now, not only are we anxious to please the Lord, we must also be anxious about worldly things, how to please our respective spouses.

When we marry, even if it's to a fellow believer, our interests are in a real way divided. So that's why Paul writes in verse 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.

But in contrast to the Corinthians, Paul's not willing to elevate this general principle into law. So he adds that he's saying this for their benefit, not to lay any restraint upon them.

Right? The phrase lay any restraint is a translation of a metaphorical expression that literally means to throw a news upon someone's neck, to throw a news upon.

So Paul's saying that his principle of singleness is for their benefit. It's not supposed to be interpreted legalistically as a news around your neck. So don't feel like legally bound to it.

[20 : 46] Don't let it be something, it's not a requirement, it's something that's helpful. It's an advice that's salutary, it's not necessary. That's the principle of singleness. And I want you guys to really think about this for a minute because this is probably not how you have, you're used to thinking about marriage and singleness.

It's definitely counter-cultural. And so let it sink in because it's unusual. Because usually the way we think about it is it's okay to stay single. Of course you don't have to marry, but it's certainly better to marry.

That's how we typically think about marriage and singleness, isn't it? But Paul teaches that while it's fine to marry, it's better to remain single. And his rationale for singleness is that it promotes undivided devotion to the Lord.

And I want to speak to those of you who are single directly. Do you see your singleness in this biblical perspective? Scripture unequivocally affirms and commends singleness as a viable way of life that can bring glory to God.

Do you see your singleness in this way? Later in verse 40, Paul says that a Christian widow who does not remarry but remains single is happier for it. Quote, the word happy means blessed or fortunate.

[22 : 02] It's the same word that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. He says, they are more blessed who remain single, the widow that does not remarry.

That means singleness is not a malady to be remedied. It is a blessing to be enjoyed for God's glory. Do you think of your singleness in that way?

Although we didn't plan this, I do not have the foresight to plan it this far out in advance, but I think it's God's providential wisdom and wonderful sense of humor that this passage falls right after Valentine's Day in the beginning of Lent.

Some of you probably hate Valentine's Day because it's a perennial reminder of your unfulfilled longing for romance and relationship and companionship.

Maybe some of you are kind of masochistic and you browse through wedding blogs and scroll through other people's social media profiles to remind yourself of just how much other people's love life is better than yours.

[23 : 06] But remember that your singleness is a blessing. Don't turn marriage into an idol. If you feel distressed or depressed by your singleness, if you feel angry or bitter toward God because of your singleness or any situation or circumstance for that matter, then you have replaced God's vision of happiness, God's vision of blessedness with your own.

Singleness is a blessing from God in which we can please the Lord. Don't buy the illusion of love and romance that our culture is selling you. Your marriage is not all roses and I say this even though I'm a happily married man.

Hannah has been a tremendous source of blessing in my life and apart from Christ and his spirit, she is the single greatest gift that I have ever received from the Lord and I cherish every day I get to spend with her and this is all true.

But I would be lying to you if I didn't tell you that it's hard. it takes work. It takes work every single day and it requires you to die to your own selfishness every single day.

There are no days off in marriage. There were times earlier in our marriage I just broke down and wept because of how hard it was because I saw the depth of that sinfulness and selfishness and ugliness in my own heart exposed by my relationship to Hannah.

[24 : 34] And there are days when I still weep because of the ways in which I know I have hurt Hannah in my own sinfulness. It's not easy to be married. So if you are going to pursue marriage it's not sin to pursue marriage but do so with biblical clarity knowing that living together with another sinner is not going to be easy it's going to be difficult.

No human relationship is going to solve all of your woes. And know this also that your marriage if you get married is going to divide your interests. When I'm counseling a church member over coffee or over the phone and the conversation is going long and I have to be mindful of the fact that the longer I am away the longer Hannah will have to hold down the fort at home and she's having a much more repetitive exhausting and less stimulating conversation with our kids.

That's the reality. My interests are divided. When we were prayerfully considering and deciding where to plant Trinity Cambridge Church there were some neighborhoods that were out of the question right from the gate right out of the gate because I could not merely think about my calling to the Lord but I had to think about how to care for my family and my kids.

Thankfully Hannah is a selfless and faithful woman so there's much that we can do together in partnership but there's no man or woman in the whole world whose interests are exactly identical to that of the Lord.

And so when you get married your interests will be divided and when you're married you have to be anxious about worldly things how to please your spouse. If you're currently single and you're old enough to have some married friends you probably have seen this already you may have noticed that your friends kind of drop off the map when they get married there's a reason for that.

[26 : 32] So if you're single let me encourage you to take advantage of your singleness harness it to serve God and his people. Even if you don't intend to be single for the rest of your life you can glorify God in your singleness now.

Because you're single in many ways you can be more spontaneous and selfless than married people can ever hope to be. Are you using that for God's glory? Of course that doesn't just happen naturally right?

God's not glorified by singleness in and of itself. You have to use singleness for God's glory because it's possible to be single and be completely selfish and undevoted to God.

There's a lot of those people as well. So it's not something that's going to come to you naturally but in your singleness you have the potential to give yourself wholly and exclusively and entirely to God.

Are you doing that? That's his rationale for singleness. But as I've said already that Paul doesn't codify this into law this principle of singleness.

[27 : 33] So he offers in this final section the exception to singleness. In verse 35 Paul said he was commending singleness to promote good order but now in verse 36 he speaks of a situation where the exact opposite is happening.

He says if anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed the phrase not behaving properly in the Greek is the negative form of this exact same word that was used in verse 35 translated promote good order.

So Paul's telling us that even though he is commending singleness to promote good order there are cases when singleness is actually not going to promote good order but tend to disorderliness and produce improper behavior between singles.

And so he says and that's what he is addressing here he says if his passions are strong this is the exception if his passions are strong and it has to be let him do as he wishes let them marry it is no sin.

If you have a strong desire to get married so that you are convinced that you ought to get married and so it has to be then scripture says let him do as he wishes let them marry it is no sin.

[28 : 48] And note the phrase let him do as he wishes it's okay to follow through with your wish to marry getting married is not a sin. So while Paul agrees that singleness is preferable for the sake of singular devotion to God for him it is not a matter of obedience or disobedience it's no sin to marry in fact as we know from Proverbs 18.22 he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

This is also true but for those who have strong passions marriage is its own blessing from God. While singleness is a great blessing from God it's not for everyone and if your passions are strong then marriage may be the blessing that God intends for you.

Recall what Paul said in verse 7 of the same chapter I wish that all were as I myself am but each has his own gift from God one of one kind and one of another.

So Paul was someone whose sexual passions were not strong and he had his desires under control. So when Paul insists that his celibacy is a gift he's saying that not all have this gift when he says I wish that all were as myself am he's saying that not all are as he is so the clear implication is that the gift of celibacy is not common to all and that's why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 that God sovereignly distributes many gifts diverse gifts to the very members of the body for the sake of promoting interdependence within the body so that means if someone has a gift of celibacy and if you don't have the gift of celibacy then you have another gift that God has given you to use for the body and it is inadvisable and dangerous for someone who does not have the gift of celibacy to insist on that and to insist on such a standard for everybody and so those who do not have the gift of celibacy have a gift of another kind so this shows us that we shouldn't elevate singleness to a point where we put people who are single on a pedestal and then look down on married people

I mean this is not as common in our context but it has been common throughout church history especially certain denominations that insist that the pastor or priest has to be celibate even if he does not have the gift of celibacy right we can't pressure or force people into the life of celibacy and that's abundantly clear from verse 37 look at it with me verse 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 right in at least four different ways Paul emphasizes that remaining betrothed and not going through with the marriage has to be the free choice of the individual that's in view right it has to be established in his heart it says he must be under no necessity and it must spring from having his desire under control and he has to have determined this in his heart so if he has his desire under control then he can choose to keep his fiancée a virgin by not going through with the marriage and if he does this

[32 : 01] Paul says he will do well now that's probably some of you guys are probably breathing a sigh of relief like okay now I don't have to feel pressure to stay single Sean's not going to pressure me into breaking up with my boyfriend or girlfriend but I don't want you to dismiss all of Paul's teaching up to this point all of a sudden because sometimes people mistakenly think that the gift of celibacy means having no sexual desire like being asexual but I don't think that's what it means because it says it talks about people who should marry if their passions are strong they should marry but if they have their desire under control that they should remain celibate so the fact that people who are to remain celibate have their desires under control means that they have desires it doesn't mean that you have no desire it means that you have a moderate desire that you're able to keep under self-control that's what it means to have the gift of celibacy so that means if you have that gift if you don't feel that it has to be if you have your desires under control then you should seriously consider singleness as a way of promoting singular devotion to God and Paul sums it up this way in verse 38 so then he who marries his betrothed does well and he who refrains from marriage will do even better marriage is good to marry is not sin and marriage too is a gift from

God but singleness is better Paul says singleness is a blessing from God in which we can please the Lord then having addressed the betrothed singles who are engaged Paul's mind returns once again to women who were formerly married but are now single whom he had specifically addressed in verses 8 to 9 he says in verse 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 so here Paul's reiterating Christ's teaching from Luke 16 18 and elsewhere that everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery so remarriage while one's former spouse is alive constitutes adultery because while the marriage vows might be broken the marriage bond cannot be broken because it was forged by God himself to be binding for life but if her husband dies he says she is free to be married to whom she wishes only in the Lord so in the case of widows marriage is an option on the table in the same way it is for singles and that's why Paul mentions them and in this short sentence

Paul offers two really helpful clues as to how eligible singles are supposed to pursue marriage and this is really as close as scripture ever comes to offering tips for dating so if you are single and you're interested in this please listen up carefully first Paul says this she is free to be married to whom she wishes right here's a biblical precedent for the idea that you should marry someone you love right someone you want to marry right and notice that Paul offers this prerogative to woman which is radically progressive for its time unheard of in the Roman Empire and notice this point Paul had focused a lot of his injunctions on men because men were expected to take the initiative and to provide leadership when it comes to pursuing engagement in marriage but this does not mean that the woman had no choice she is to marry whom she wishes right in a now classic article entitled the age of Roman girls at marriage this was published in 1965 by a historical demographer named

Keith Hopkins he noted that most Roman marriages involved prepubescent girls around the age of 12 or younger and they were given away in marriage to much older men that was common practice in the Roman Empire but when he parsed out the Roman marriages according to their religious affiliation he found out that Christian women in the Roman Empire were three times as less likely to have married by the age of 13 right they had much more choice in the matter and they married far later than people in the typical woman in the Roman Empire and that's because of the unprecedented dignity that the church accorded to their woman and because of verses like this that specifically teach that women should marry whom they want many traditional cultures have arranged marriages right because they see marriage as essential and necessary for the upbringing of society but marriage is not essential or necessary for the Christian so you should wait for someone you want to marry that's the first tip then the second guideline is this only in the

Lord this is really the only requirement that Paul gives us for your potential spouse he or she must be someone who shares your faith in and your commitment to the Lord note that it doesn't say only those whose bank accounts are full only those who are sufficiently attractive only those who are sufficiently educated Paul says very simply only in the Lord because marriage is to be a picture of the church's union with Christ it will work as God intended it only in so far as you follow in your marriage the pattern of Christ's self-giving love and the church's self-giving submission it's impossible to do this when your spouse doesn't even believe that Christ gave himself for the church so this criterion is critical and think about this if marriage to a Christian divides your interests can you imagine what marriage to an unbeliever will do if you follow scripture's command and seek to marry only in the Lord then there are some more implications for your dating life as well the Bible doesn't have a category for dating because until you're married for all intents and purposes you're single from a biblical point of view and that means because you're not yet married you need to treat your boyfriend or girlfriend as a

[38 : 21] Christian brother or sister for example 1st Timothy 5 verse 2 teaches us to treat older women in the church as mothers and younger women as sisters in all purity and if that's the case that means you shouldn't do anything to them or with them that you wouldn't do with your own brother or sister they are to be safeguarded in all purity 1st Thessalonians 4 3 it teaches that transgressing sexual boundaries with other believers is equivalent to wronging or cheating a brother or sister by depriving one another of God's good design for sex within marriage we defraud exploit and cheat one another so if there's biblical grounds for getting married because your passions are strong then I think there's also biblical grounds for not delaying marriage because your passions are strong if your passions are strong don't let your wedding planning get in the way of a marriage get it done get married finally having offered these guidelines for singles and for seeking marriage

Paul returns once again to the main theme of this passage in verse 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 so Paul writes as a spirit inspired apostle that while marriage is a blessing it is more blessed to remain single because singleness is a blessing from God in which we can please the Lord in the Roman Empire the widows faced tremendous pressure to remarry in fact because they had no recourse to survival apart from the income of their husbands in most cases and for that reason actually this Rodney Stark who is an American sociologist who is teaching at Baylor University writes about this reality that Christians the way they treated widows was radically different he says should they be widowed Christian women enjoyed very substantial advantages pagan widows faced great social pressure to remarry Augustus even had widows fined if they failed to remarry within two years of course when a pagan widow did remarry she lost all of her inheritance it became the property of her new husband in contrast among

Christians widowhood was highly respected and remarriage was if anything mildly discouraged thus not only were well-to-do Christian widows enabled to keep their husband's estate the church stood ready to sustain poor widows allowing them a choice as to whether or not to remarry why has the church been so different throughout history in the way it treated singles because the Bible teaches that singleness is a blessing from God in which we can please the Lord many in our society view singles with suspicion especially older singles and in fact there's now a term for this I found out social scientist Bella DePaulo coins the term singlism in her book Singled Out and defines it as the stereotyping and stigmatizing and discrimination of people who are not married but the church consistently and throughout history offered a more positive and sensible view of singleness and it has made the sacrifices necessary to sustain singles in their singlehood we need to recover that idea once again in our generation

I know that this is difficult to accept for a lot of you it's so counterintuitive and you will neither believe this nor live by it unless you make sense of it in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the reason because the reason why marriage has such an enduring appeal for so many of us is because it is a picture of an ultimate reality of the church's eternal union with Christ union with God so throughout scripture our Lord Jesus Christ is described as the bridegroom that comes to claim her bride which is us the church Ephesians 5 25-20 described Christ as the husband who sanctified the church to set her apart for himself to be presented to him as a bride Jesus is the prince of peace who slew the great dragon that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan and to rescue the church as a bride for himself it's the ultimate fairy tale he's the prince who killed the dragon to get the girl to get the church to claim the bride for himself and he did this by dying on the cross for our sins thereby shattering the chains of sin that held us enslaved to the dragon that he emerged from the grave victoriously and he is now preparing his bride for that great wedding day when our union with Christ will be consummated that's the gospel the good news of Jesus Christ that's why marriage is so glorious because it's supposed to be a picture of that reality but here's why this should fill those of you who are single with hope marriage is a picture of the ultimate reality it's not the ultimate reality itself it's a shadow of what is to come

Jesus teaches in Matthew 22 to 30 in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven there's no marriage in heaven because in heaven the eternal spiritual reality that marriage pointed to will be consummated so you no longer need a picture of Christ's love when you come face to face with Christ himself and because humanity was created for this ultimate relationship with God if you are not yet a follower of Jesus Christ and you are seeking a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a husband or a wife to alleviate your loneliness and satisfy your longing for love and companionship then you're putting an eternal weight on a temporal reality and your expectations will crumble under the pressure turn to Christ today and you will experience the foretaste today of that eternal union with God and if you are already a follower of Christ and you are single then you are to skip the picture so to speak to be devoted to God entirely and exclusively as we will be in heaven you are to find companionship and support not in forming a biological family but in your spiritual family the church you are to focus on propagating spiritual children of God through the proclamation of the gospel rather than focusing on propagating biological children through sexual intercourse you are to be a daily reminder to all those around you that what gives you true eternal significance is not a man and is not a woman but your relationship with God you are to show by your singleness that the greatest love in the world is not the love between a man and a woman but God's love for his people

[45 : 13] I know that some of you have strong passions and you deeply desire to get married and you have not been able to some of you but your loneliness might be unbearable at times and you might be overwhelmed by a sense of insecurity and self-doubt that comes with that but remember this truth you will have yourself a wedding day in the end you will have yourself a bridegroom in the end and he is an incomparable and peerless bridegroom Isaiah 61 10 says I will greatly rejoice in the Lord my soul shall exalt in my God for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation he has covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels even if you never get to have your dream wedding that wedding day will be more beautiful than anything you could have imagined even if you never find a man or a woman to have and to hold

Christ will be to you a more beautiful more lovely more faithful and true bridegroom than you could have ever hoped for in 1st Samuel 1 when Hannah is despondent because she is barren and she is crying and Elkanah her husband says to her Hannah why do you weep and why do you not eat and why is your heart sad am I not more to you than ten sons let me ask you is not Christ more to you than a husband is not Christ more to you than a wife is not Christ more to you than the thousands chiefest among thousands is not Christ more to you than the whole world over let your singleness of devotion to God be so apparent whether you're married or single that the answer to that question is obvious to everybody who knows you and sees you let's pray together

God this is a lofty calling to be wholly devoted to you we cannot do it apart from the help of your spirit we cannot do it apart from the love that you revealed in your son Jesus Christ the way in which you loved us first died for us gave yourself for us define us with that love ground us in that love so that we can live in singular devotion to you as your lover as your bride as the church in Jesus name we pray amen¹⁹ peace peace peace peace peace peace peace you peace peace peace peace peace peace peace