

I Corinthians 1 - 7 Marriage and Mission I Corinthians 7:32-40"

This is a special occasion when we install, and in some cases, ordain new leaders. If you've been coming on the evenings, you know we've been working our way through I Corinthians. What I've tried to do is put together a teaching that covers a portion of one and seven, which is where we are right now, and to connect it to gospel ministry.

And my theme tonight is that as we seek first the Kingdom, it's going to create tensions in our life, tensions between doing things the ordinary way, the easier way, the way we might find more pleasant, and the way that shows we're actually putting the kingdom first. Got a sacrifice? We're still married, we still have children, but we have to lay them aside a little bit at times in order to serve the king and serve the kingdom.

That's what I Corinthians 7:25-35 says. And then, for those of you who are officers, I'm going to say also a portion of this is what I would have said yesterday if all you softies and cowards had been willing to drive to the church on Saturday morning. I would have only had to say it once. 😊

So I'm going to say a few of the things you newly ordained and newly serving brothers would have heard, as we were to have gathered yesterday and will still gather in the future. Read I Corinthians 7:25-35 and look at some other passages as well. Would you stand for the reading of God's Word? Apostle Paul is speaking to the church of Corinth, and his theme is marriage and singleness, which you'll see in a minute. But it also applies, I believe, to calls to serve God and His church. This is what he says.

Now concerning the betrothed. I have no command from the Lord. Lord Jesus didn't tell me anything about this. So he says, I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. This is my judgment telling you what I think he says, but I'm trustworthy. I'm an apostle. So he speaks. And so what he says, he says, 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 that is single? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned. And if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who married will have worldly troubles. And I would spare you that. 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, and let those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing in those who by as though they had no goods, 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 thus far the reading of God's Word.

I'll read a few more verses later. Let's pray together for a moment.

Heavenly father, I do pray that you would give us willingness to live in the tension between ordinary life and kingdom life, the tension between distress and normality. We might say, and the need to sacrifice for you. I do pray especially for those who are ordained leaders and for other leaders, maybe non ordained leaders here today that we would hear what you're saying to us in your word. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Now I want to say that I'm going to cover these verses really fast, because we're going to cover them again a few weeks later, but I still want to cover them really fast and make sure we hear what the apostle Paul saying, he's saying that it's okay to be single and it's okay to be married. And he's saying that if you are single, it's fine to stay single. And if you're married, it's fine to stay married. They're both good, but there are a couple features he wants to point out. This is the one passage in the Bible where he commends singleness, and he says, there are a couple of reasons for that. Number one, there is a present distress. You see that we past already. verse 26, he says because of the present distress, that means there's something going on going on in their life at that time. Now, people aren't quite sure what it is, but most people think that there was a very severe famine in that time in that region of the world at exactly the time Paul's writing. And that's the distress they're in. And it's hard to get married and have children when people everywhere are starving. People have other views. But that's probably what he's referring to because of the present distress.

Verse 26, you should remain as you are. Don't hurry to get a divorce, certainly, and don't strive to be free and don't hurry to get married. Now, of course, if you do marry, he says in verse 28, you haven't done anything wrong. You haven't sinned. There's nothing wrong. But he wants to spare his world the troubles, he says. And furthermore, he says the appointed time has grown short, and that probably means he's saying there's an urgency to life in this age, and you can't just go through life in this age as if, as if one day is the same as another. There is there is an urgency to the work of the kingdom. There's an urgency to evangelism.

You sometimes have to sacrifice. You have to bear that in mind. We're living not just to please ourselves. And then he points it out. He says. He says it in a variety of ways. He says, listen, here's what I'm trying to tell you that from now on, those who have wives should act as if they had none. And that's not good news to women who are married to someone who can become an elder, a deacon and say, well, you should have told me that before you became an elder, before you signed up to be a deacon.

But Paul saying is not absolute, the rules for marriage still hold. I'm going to ask you to keep your finger in first Corinthians seven and jump over to Genesis chapter two, which is God's basic instruction for marriage, and it's never rescinded. This passage is not saying that the most basic rules for marriage are over. Here's what the apostle has in his mind. As he says this. He says it's good to be married. It's good to be single. Right now we're in a crisis. But he's not forgetting what the Lord said to Moses. The Lord said, *therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and this*

should become one flesh. And the man and his wife are both naked, and we're not ashamed.

A man shall leave his father. Mother means marriage is more important than the bond to your parents. It means that marriage is more important than the bond to your children. It means the most important human bond anybody ever has is the marital bond. You leave, you leave. One of the great problems of our age is that in some cultures, especially in Asian cultures, people are so devoted to their parents they neglect their spouse.

And in our culture, we're tempted to be so devoted to our children that we neglect our spouse. We should put our spouse, first of all, human obligations. And Paul knows this, and he also knows Jesus quotes it in Matthew chapter 19. We all know that not only are we supposed to leave father or mother, break or subordinate all other relationships, but we're also supposed to hold fast to our wife, hold fast to our husband, be glued to our husband, be as close as you can be, and be naked in one flesh.

That means we're united when we hold fast. We hold fast with our mind and our will and our emotions, and also with our bodies. And we put that first. That's number one. Paul is not forgetting that in first Corinthians chapter seven, he's talking about a moment of distress and the fact that there's an urgency and urgency. The gospel proclamation in the first century after the Lord first came and the apostles are trying to go out throughout the world. And I have to say, there's an urgency today to and sometimes to be very, very, very candid. Sometimes when you're an elder, a deacon, you're going to disappoint your wife. Some is to be in the hospital. They're in your flock, they're under your care, and you have to go and you're going to watch that movie. You're going to put that puzzle together. You're going to go out to eat. You say, I'm sorry, honey, I just I've got to go serve this person because there's an urgency or you're in a conversation with somebody and you're supposed to be home. You said you'd be home, but you're in a conversation with somebody about spiritual things. And in this present distress, the time is short.

You can't just say, hey, I'll talk to you some other time. There may not be another time to talk, so you have to put your marriage a little bit to the side. Now that's a tension I'm not urging you to abandon your wife, but go to hear what Paul's saying. Listen, when he says, he says, from now on with those verse 29 who have wives live as though they had none. That's an exaggeration, but it's an exaggeration that needs to be made. And those who mourn as though they were not mourning. Now we mourn when we lose a job, when someone near and dear to us dies. But. But there's a place, a time to put aside our mourning. Because we have jobs to do for the kingdom and those who rejoice as though they're not rejoicing.

Those are by so they had no goods. Those who deal in the world. This is they had no dealings. Yet the relative dies at all for the sake of the kingdom. Now, I don't know how you do that. How you do it. Well, how do you please your husband, your how you

please your wife, how you please your children when you have to lay aside ordinary duties.

But sometimes we have to lay aside ordinary duties and pretend we don't possess things like a boat, a new boat, or a second house, because the kingdom demands that you act as though you had not. That which you in fact do have. And Paul goes on to say in verse 32, and following that, he wants us to be free from anxieties, but just want to pause and make this a little bit more clear for a minute.

Maybe I'll do it through a personal illustrations, very mild illustration. But in our house I get up before my wife does. I'm going to say 362 days a year. Once in a great while, once in a while we reverse roles. And one of the things I do is get to work right away. I like to work. The first thing. I'll work in my pajamas, I'll work in my bathrobe. I wake up and I want to do some stuff, go through some emails, work on some things, and I press the button on the coffee machine. And I listen for my wife and my highest goal I can have is to hear my wife rustling and just hear her feet hit the floor and bring the coffee to her. Within about 30s of the time her feet hit the floor. Now, it was easier when we lived in Saint Louis because it was two stories and our bedroom floor creaked and so it was much easier. But I'm getting it sometimes. Now. Now when that happens, when I give her that coffee, I am stopping my work because I don't just give her coffee, I give her a hug. We talk for a minute. Off we go. It's not long, but I'm interrupting my work on whatever it is I'm working on. That's a tiny illustration of the point that when we're married and serving the kingdom, we can't simply please our spouse the way we did before. You please your spouse. You bring her coffee, you take care of her.

But you're losing a little tiny bit of something. You're just breaking off from the kingdom, and you have to be careful about that, is what I'm saying. So Paul says, let me make a limited case for singleness. Marriage brings pleasures. Marriage brings privileges. But in this age, Paul says, we can't simply please ourselves, but to please the Lord.

We have to please the King. Now, in verses 32 and following, he mentions it in the language of anxieties, which somehow, the way it turns out, I spoke about a little bit last Sunday. So I'm to ask you to read along 732 to 34 he says, I want you to be free from anxieties because the unmarried man is anxious.

He cares deeply, of course, is the point about the things 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, her 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.

I say this for your benefit, not to lay restraint upon you, but promote good order and secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. Now, again, the vast majority of time in the Bible, the Bible assumes that almost everybody is going to get married and have children. Husband and wife join together. They form a marriage. But and this one place in the Bible, he's saying, please understand the case for singleness.

What happens with a single person is that they have the ability to have undivided devotion to the Lord, and then he's speaking to married people and saying, and you need to try to tap into that a little bit. Because the truth is, if all you're anxious about is how to make your spouse happy, if that's all you care about, then you're not going to care enough about the things of the Lord.

Now, I want to make absolutely clear we are supposed to please our spouses. We should. Paul's not condemning the act of pleasing our spouse. Let me let me speak personally. Suppose for a moment, and this is not true. But suppose for a moment that I like hip hop music. Actually, I hate it. And suppose for a moment that I like highly dissonant jazz.

And suppose for a moment that I like, heavy metal music. And I know my wife does not like any of those things. I have to I ought to either turn it down or turn it off when she comes to our house when she's been away. Right. Because my job is not to please myself with the kind of music I like.

It's to please her. We are supposed to please our spouse. And if I like him and my wife says, you know, it would be really great if we would put onions and raisin sauce on the ham. And I say, but I hate raisin sauce. That's supposed to be sufficient to make her stop giving me raisin sauce, right?

I don't like it is enough. You want raisin sauce? Put it on your hand. Don't put it on my ham because we're really supposed to please each other. Paul assumes that. And it's right to please your spouse. But it's wrong to live only to please your spouse. You please your spouse, and you have to have a care. You have to be anxious can be translated.

Worry. You worry. You think. You fret. You roll it over in your mind. How do I please my husband? How do I please my wife? But we're also supposed to turn it over in our mind. How do I please the Lord? How do I sometimes lay aside my obligation to take care of, to love my wife, my husband, my child, because I have work to do from the Lord?

Just a quick word about anxieties. There are good anxieties and bad anxieties. Bad anxieties are just fretting and fretting, fretting and fretting about things we can't control. People who fret about airplanes going down as they get on the plane. I got to tell you your worries do not give the plane any extra lift.

It doesn't help the plane at all. But there are the things we're concerned about. It's the same word. But, you know, on the one hand it's negative and sometimes it's positive. We're concerned. We think about it. We think about it a lot because we want to make sure we get it right. In the book of Philippians chapter two, verse 20 and chapter four, verse six, Paul uses the word anxiety twice and one time it's good and one time it's not good.

In chapter two, verse 20, he says, Timothy is genuinely anxious about your welfare. He really cares about your welfare. But in chapter four, verse six he says, don't be anxious

about anything. There's a good anxiety about things that are godly and right, something you can do something about that you can galvanize yourself for action by giving it some thought.

And there's bad anxiety that's fruitless and leads to no action and can't change anything. So be concerned about the right things. The Bible is very candid about concerns barren women, lost animals.

Anxiety weighs man's heart down. Proverbs says, so worry about the right things. And what should you worry about? This passage is saying you should be anxious about. You should worry about the affairs of the kingdom of God. Please each other, yes, but care about the things of God. Let me illustrate it again a different way. I was some I was in my office one day and one of my grandchildren was at our house for a little while.

I may have possibly told some of this story, but, she was at our house for a few days, and she was, she was two years old, and she knew that when the doors closed that means papa is working. If the doors closed all the way means don't come in. Papa is working. Papa is working on kingdom causes. And the knock came on the door. And it came on the door of the way. A two year old knocks on the door, immediately followed by the door knob turning. And then she comes and she said, Papa, can you read me a story? And I said, no, I cannot read you a story. I'm working, you know. The door was closed and when the doors closed, it means papa is working. So I can't read you a story. And she fixed her eyes on me and said, Danny the dinosaur. Now, I have no idea how this two year and three month old child knew that the weakest spot in my armor is the book Danny the Dinosaur, which is one of the greatest novels ever written. By Sid Hoff, one of the truly, if you don't know Sid Hoff were truly one of the great children's stories writers. And so I read Danny in the Dinosaur, and I didn't get something done. It's not easy to decide when you lay aside kingdom causes and when you take up family causes. It's not easy. I can't give you a formula. It's a matter of prayer. But I have to say to you, if you're entering into ministry as an elder deacon, or if you're coming back into service as an elder or a deacon, sometimes you're going to have to say, I lay kingdom causes aside.

I'm going to take care of my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my friends, etc. I'm gonna take care of myself. I'm going to go out and play. I'm gonna have fun. I'm gonna have a good time. And sometimes you have to say, you know what? That golf game has got to be canceled. I'm sorry, guys, I can't come.

There's somebody who needs me. I'm sorry. And it's going to hurt sometimes. It's going to hurt to say I don't get to go to the game, play the game, go out to dinner with my friends or family. And yet we're supposed to be anxious for the things of the Lord. Marriage is good for us. And I'm not saying you should lay marriage aside.

I think of the people in the good people in the history of the church who had a life in which they were single, and a life in which they were single. A lot of the times, man. And

Craig Keener, who's not a close friend of mine, but we certainly know each other, one of the great scholars of our day.

And Craig was single for a number of years, and Craig worked himself almost to death. He just worked and worked and worked 20 hours a day. He would work and work and work and then and then the people came around him and said, you know what? You need a spouse. You're going to wear yourself out with all your studies.

And he did get a spouse around the age of 40, and he's so glad he got married because she, you know, rounded him out. And, and we need to get married. And, and people get married late in life, say crazy things, especially men. They say things like, I never knew what time it was. Somehow. And I defied social conventions that I ever did everything and I didn't dress properly.

And so marriage is good for us. And John Calvin was married for nine years of his 55 years. It was the same thing. He was working and working and working 20 hours a day, people say. And he said it himself 20 hours a day. And the people around him said, you better get somebody to take care of you.

You're just going to keel over.

Clothe you, make your bed, prepare meals for you. And they kept sending people to him. And he kept saying, not spiritual enough, not spiritual enough, not spiritual enough. And finally one came by and he said, spiritual enough. And they got married. They only were married for nine years. She died as a result of childbirth, you know, a long, slow process.

He grieved for the rest of his life and other people had to step in. Marriage is good. But in the case of people like Craig Keener and John Calvin, sometimes you have to lay aside the ordinary pleasures of life. And that's, that's the big idea. Also, want to make sure we talk about the tensions we have in ministry.

That is to say, the two sides of ministry ask you to turn with me to first Timothy chapter four, verses 13 to 16.

First Timothy says this.

Timothy was about, 39, 38 years old when Paul wrote to him and he said in chapter three, you know, the most important thing you can do as a minister of the gospel, as an elder, a deacon, is to watch your character. If you look at the description of a leader in first Timothy three, what you're not going to do now, and we did it a while ago, a year ago, maybe at this very occasion.

The emphasis, the accent is on character. There are 13 traits. 11 of them are character traits, godliness, virtue. Two of them are tasks, and the two tasks are teaching and caring for the church. That's the first time he talks about leadership. But if you're a leader, you need to know that the second time he talks about leadership, he makes it 5050.

Read with me, if you will. He says, let no one despise you for your youth. Verse 12, you're 38, you're 39. But set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. That's character. Five traits of character. Your speech speak well in your daily conduct. Everything you do in your love for the Lord and for each other in your faith and in your purity.

Five traits of character. And then he says, until I come get to work, until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, which me not just reading it, but explaining it to exhortation. That means preaching essentially, and to teaching. That means one on one or in small groups. This is your job. You're a teacher, so prepare for it.

Do it. Don't neglect the gift you have. The gift he has his teaching. So teach. You have to do what God has appointed you to do. It was given to you by prophecy when the elders laid their hands. And this is a serious business. You're given a serious gift by God. Everyone knows about your gift. You got to do it.

Practice these things, he says. Immerse yourself in them so that all miss your progress. Now it goes back to our character. Practice them, do them. Use your gifts and let everybody see your progress, progress and what progress in using your gifts, but also progress in your life because our character counts. He then says to wrap it up together, put a clause.

Keep a close watch on yourself. That would be your character and on the teaching. They have to come together. Persist in this, for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers. What that means is use your gifts so you have the friends. You have to hold this intention. You who are going to be ordained or being ordained, got a hold an intention character first, but your actual service is a very close second.

You got to know your gift. Read Romans chapter 12. It describes the gifts that God's people have and as it does at the end. Romans 12 verses four and following says, look, the body has many members. We don't have the same function. He says. We have gifts that differ and let's use them. And then he says this if you have the gift of prophecy, it has to be in proportion to our faith.

That is to say this, whatever you prophesy, what you say is to be accurate doctrinally. If service in our serving. That is to say, if you have the gift of service, then serve. That's back to the point. You sometimes have to lay down your. Marital pleasures. Pleasures at home. The one who teaches in his teaching. The one who exhorts his exhortation.

If you have the gift, use it. And then he says, the one who contributes with generosity should be happy. As you give, you're joyful in giving. The one who leads with zeal. That's not happiness, that's passion for the work. And then he says, the one who performs acts of mercy with cheerfulness. That is to say, sometimes it's a delight and sometimes it's a matter of zeal for the kingdom of God and for his work.

So I commend all of you to take up this charge. It's a big charge. It's a hard charge is no easy. There's no easy answer to the question, when do we please our spouse? When

do we pleased the Lord? I'm reminded as I was preparing. You've been going over this this afternoon again. There's the question Paul asks in one place.

He says, who is sufficient for these things? He doesn't exactly answer it. He lets the he lets the answer dangle the question, dangle there. And then at the end of the epistle, he says, the Lord says, my grace is sufficient. It's a big charge, my friends, those of you becoming elders and deacons, becoming elders and deacons again, it's a big charge.

Who is sufficient for these things? My grace is sufficient, the Lord answers.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly father, I do pray for these men are about to come up and pray for their wives and for their children as well. And, maybe they didn't like this sermon because of, bad news about sacrifice not necessarily doing everything exactly what we would like.

But, Lord, it's part of your teaching. And so, Lord, we're willing to recognize that we have to lay aside our privileges and our pleasures from time to time in order to serve you. Give these men judgment to do that well and rightly, and to delight in it, and give them whores. Give these husbands, wives, and children who understand that a great calling has been laid upon them by you, Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen.