

# 1 Corinthians Chapter 7 v 17 - 40

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

And particularly the last few verses before verse 6, talking about those who teach falsehood, those who particularly are concerned about financial gain.

And so I'm just going to read, just read, don't need to read through with me, just follow through with me from verse 6.

[ 2 : 21 ] Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith, pierced themselves with many griefs.

And so I'm just going to read, just read, don't need to read through with me. And so I'm just going to read, just read, don't need to read through with me.

The King of kings and the Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, who no one has seen or can see, to him be honour and might forever. Amen.

These two passages come together really. Paul talking about this contentment, this acceptance of our circumstances and of God's provision for us, and the foolishness of seeking and striving for those things which will pierce us with many griefs.

And then to Timothy, in his ministry, he's really saying, keep on going, fight the good fight. Don't be overwhelmed. Remember the Lord Jesus, who faithfully carried on trusting God in the midst of all that he suffered.

[ 4 : 05 ] Because the time is coming. In God's own time, as he puts it in verse 15, when the Lord Jesus will return, when everyone will see him as he is.

And he will receive the honour and glory he deserves. Our life is a life of faith, dear friends, a walk of faith. And we know that our God is faithful.

And so as we come to the Lord in prayer together, let's come and seek his face. Our most faithful and wonderful God in heaven, we thank you that this evening, the things that we have sung about we know to be true.

And yet, Lord, we also make them our statement of faith at the outset of our worship this evening, that our hope is grounded and founded in you, that our trust rests upon you.

Lord, we know that there are times in our lives and times even during the day when our faith wobbles, when our trust is unsteadied. Because of circumstances, because of the devil, our enemy who sows doubts into our minds and hearts, because of the world in which we live with its sin and wickedness so rampantly at work around about us, there are times when we lose sight of you, times, O Lord, when we fret, are anxious, are worried.

[ 5 : 39 ] But, O Lord, our desire is, and we know that the place for peace in our hearts is found in trusting you in all things and for all things and at all times.

And so we pray that in our time together this evening, you would strengthen our faith and increase our faith, that we might prove you faithful in the coming week, in the coming days, months, or however long, Lord, until you come again, Lord Jesus.

We thank you, O Lord, that we do not need to be afraid. Lord, whatever the world says, whatever the circumstances seem to show, faith is not based upon what we see and hear.

It is based upon, O Lord, you, the unchanging, unalterable God. Upon your word, which is full of your promises that you have kept, will keep, and shall always keep.

And it's particularly grounded upon the historical event of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not upon a myth or a story or imagination, but upon the real person, the real man God, Jesus Christ, who coming from heaven, took to himself our humanity, who lived amongst us, who walked where we

walk, who breathed the air we breathe, who suffered the pains that we suffer, the sorrows and the griefs, and yet in every way did not sin, did not fail to keep your commandments, but kept them to the full.

[ 7 : 18 ] And, O Lord, in obedience and love, went to the cross and suffered and died. Because that was your will. Because that was your plan that he should do that.

Because there was no other way for men or women, boys or girls, to ever be saved, apart from the cross. And, Lord, we thank you that you willingly went there, and you willingly died there.

Lord, upon your mouth were the words of forgiveness, those words of accomplishment. It is finished. Those words of faith into your hands, I commit my spirit.

So we, Lord, in this day, and in the coming days, can likewise enjoy the forgiveness that you have bought. Lord, we can face the future with faith and trust.

Lord, yes, we can face whatever comes our way, knowing that, Lord, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. That nothing, O Lord, can defeat us.

[ 8 : 21 ] Nothing can take from us your loving kindness and that gift of eternal life. Nothing can stop us being the objects of your affection. Nothing can stop us being the recipients of your grace.

And so, Lord, we pray that in this time, as we bring our worship and praise, as we speak to you, with you, and about you, O Lord, may you be present amongst us.

And may you, O Lord, work in us all that is pleasing to you and all that is good for us. We ask these things in the name. Jesus Christ, our Saviour and coming King.

Amen. Amen. We're going to read together from 1 Corinthians and chapter 7. Now, those of you who were with us last week or in the previous weeks know that we've been studying 1 Corinthians.

And last week, we looked at the first half of chapter 7. And we're going to look at the second half, God willing, this evening. So, we're going to read from verse 17 of 1 Corinthians 7.

[ 9 : 32 ] If you have one of the church Bibles, that's 1149, page 1149. Now, in the first half, we looked how Paul gives very practical and, for us as well, contemporary instruction about the matter of married life, of the importance of it, and how we are to relate to one another in a sinful world where marriage then, as now, was demeaned and considered something trivial.

And so, Paul ends up by talking about, in the verses 15 and 16, he talks about the fact that marriages do go wrong. And we looked at that as well. So, we pick up from verse 17, and we continue through to the end of the chapter.

Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.

This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called?

He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing. An uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

[ 11 : 01 ] Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you. Although, if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person.

Similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price. Do not become slaves of human beings.

Brothers and sisters, each person as responsible to God should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. Now about virgins, I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

Because of the present crisis, I think that it's good for a man to remain as he is. Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment?

Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you've not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she's not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

[ 12 : 07 ] What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on, those who have wives should live as if they do not. Those who mourn as if they do not.

Those who are happy as if they were not. Those who buy something as if it were not theirs to keep. Those who use the things of this world as if not engrossed in them.

For this world in its present form is passing away. I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs.

How he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world. How he can please his wife. And his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs.

Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world. How she can please her husband.

[13:07] I'm saying this for your own good. Not to restrict you. But that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably towards the virgin he's engaged to. And if his passions are too strong. And he feels he ought to marry. He should do as he wants.

He's not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind. Who is under no compulsion. But has control over his own will.

And who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin. This man also does the right thing. So then. He who marries the virgin does right. He who does not marry her. Does better.

A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies. She is free to marry anyone she wishes. But he must belong to the Lord.

[14:03] In my judgment. She is happier. If she stays as she is. And I think that I too. Have the spirit. Of God. Well we trust.

And look to the Lord. To help. And apply his word to our lives. Let's. Let's. Let's turn back then. To 1 Corinthians. And chapter 7.

Where we read. Just. A few moments ago. While you're turning there. That's. Again just to remind you.

That's page 1149. Page 1149. In the church bible. Just while you're turning there. I'm going to read briefly. From Matthew. In chapter. Six.

So do not worry. Saying what shall we eat.

[14:59] Or what shall we drink. Or what shall we wear. For the pagans run after all these things. And your heavenly father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom.

And his righteousness. And all these things will be added unto you. Or given to you as well.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow. For tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble. Of its own. Back to 1 Corinthians 7. Do you know if you are.

A member of the baby boomer generation. Well if you were born. After 1946. And for several years beyond that.

Then you are. Part of the baby boomer. Because during those years. Immediately after the second world war. There was a marked increase. A heightening in the birth rate.

[15:57] Within the UK. The reason for that was. Because servicemen and women. Returning from war. Peace being settled. Got married.

And or started. A family. The war. The war had prevented. Couples from marrying. Or at least put them off getting married. Or put them off starting a family. Until the war was over.

The great concern for the whole nation. In those five or nearly six years. Was the winning. The winning. The winning. The winning. The winning. The winning. Of the war. Now when Paul writes to the Corinthians here.

There's a sense of inevitability about conflict. It's as if there's an impending time of trouble coming. That he feels he has to write in the way that he does.

In verse 26 he speaks about it because of the present crisis. And then later on verse 29. What I mean brothers and sisters is that the time is short.

[17:00] Most commentators on this believe that Paul is writing at the time when persecution is building up within the Roman Empire against God's people. Against the Jewish nation in particular which would lead to terrible wars in Palestine, in Israel around about AD 70 and the destruction of the temple and the dissipation of all Jewish people.

But Christians were getting caught up in this as well because as far as the Roman authorities were concerned they couldn't tell a lot of difference between Jews and Christians. Christians they all were people who were going on about Messiahs.

They were all sort of bunched together by them as one troublesome lot. And so persecution was coming. And persecution was already started in the time of Paul in round about the later end of the first half of the first century.

Whether Paul saw these events as being a sign that Christ was coming imminently we don't know for sure. But certainly he and the church in the first century very much had the conviction that really every believer has is that in my lifetime Christ should be coming or may well be coming.

The goal of Christ's coming is something that they were aware of. We see that at the end of verse 31. For this world in its present form is passing away. Talking about what Peter speaks about how this world as we know it, this universe and everything in it will be rolled up as a scroll and be destroyed for a new heavens and a new air.

[ 18 : 37 ] Now in the first part of chapter 7 we were looking at the beginning of Paul answering a letter. A letter with questions and concerns from the church in Corinth.

Chapter 7 verse 1. Now for the matters you wrote about. And so he's continuing to reply to those questions as we go into this second half of the chapter.

And as you'll see the matter of marriage and singleness and so on that we thought about last week continues and is caught up again in his teaching.

But what he's most concerned about, what he wants us to focus on and he wants the believers in Corinth to focus on is the most important subject. How should I live for Christ in the place where he has put me?

We see that in verse 17. Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them. And there are three areas of concern within the church at Corinth, within the society of that day, which reflect in this part of the letter.

[ 19 : 45 ] First of all there was the area of religion. There was the area of society or social matters. And there was the area of relationships. And the first two he deals with quite briefly, before returning to what has been the main subject here, marriage, singleness, relationships.

Now the overarching aim, as far as Paul is concerned, the overarching aim of every Christian is to learn to be content wherever they are.

In their religious situation, in their social situation, in their marriage and relational situation. We see that comes out again and again. Verse 17.

Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to him. Verse 20. Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

Verse 32. I would like you to be free from concern. Speaking about marriage and so on. Paul's message here is contentment.

[ 20 : 52 ] The lost art of Christian contentment. But why does he stress it? Why does he stress contentment? Why does he stress this remaining, abiding? In one sense, being settled where you are.

Why does he want us, in one sense, to strive after contentment? To work for and seek after contentment? Well, we know that for the Apostle Paul, it was something which was very close to his heart.

It was one of the things that he himself had learnt from the Lord through the circumstances of his life. In Philippians chapter 4, we read about that.

If you want to turn there, it's page 1181. Just as I read from verse 10. I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me.

Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I'm not saying this because I'm in need. For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

[ 21 : 49 ] I know what it is to be in need. And I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in every and any situation. Whether well-fed, whether living in plenty, whether hungry, whether in want, I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

And it's one of the things that Paul wanted and longed for Christian believers to know because he saw it as a place of great blessing. That's why, at very start, I read from 1 Timothy in chapter 6, where Paul states godliness with contentment is great gain.

Something to really value, to cherish. Godliness with contentment. So once again, we see as we look at Paul's writing, we look at the Scriptures, we see how very different the worldview of the Christian is to the worldview of the unbeliever.

Paul is saying, remain, be content where you are. Accept the circumstances and situation in which God has placed you, and in one sense, be happy there.

Whereby, that's very different to our present generation. The slogan of our generation is, better yourself. Further your career. Improve your status.

[ 23 : 10 ] Get up the corporate ladder. All these are continuous commands which are placed upon us, or duties placed upon us. That if you are to be content, you cannot possibly be content where you are.

You've always got to strive for something else to make you happy, whatever it may be. You've always got to improve upon where you are. And yet, for the believer, there is, to begin with, a recognition that where we are in life is where God has placed us, where God has called us. We have that sense of calling being used twice. Verse 17, just as God has called them. Verse 20, each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

He's talking about those who've come to faith in Christ in adulthood, usually, and they find themselves in a circumstance and situation. He's saying, God knew all about this when he saved you.

He knew where you were. He knew the position that you were in. And he wants you to be content there. And Paul uses two examples of this, two particular examples, which maybe on the surface of it don't seem to be all that applicable to us.

[ 24 : 25 ] But surely, as we look at them, we shall see that they are. First of all, he talks about circumcision. Verse 18, was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not be uncircumcised.

Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Now, circumcision was a cause of great division within the church in the New Testament period. Great division, really, in society of Paul's day.

See, the Jew, of course, who was circumcised, looked down upon the uncircumcised Gentile. Because for the Jew, he saw that he was part of the covenant people of God.

He saw that he was somebody who was privileged. He saw that he was somebody who was special in God's sight. And everybody else was beneath him. Everybody else was just a second-class citizen if they weren't circumcised.

But, on the other hand, the uncircumcised Gentiles despised the Jew, despised the sign, because they saw them as being uneducated, superstitious, and unenlightened, like the Greek wisdom of the day.

[ 25 : 37 ] And so there was this division. It's another one of those problems, wasn't it, within the church at Corinth that we've seen, that there were divisions, right from the start, back in chapter 1, verse 10.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

This has always been the great problem within every single local church, with every single national church within the church worldwide, throughout every age, division. And here the division within the church was based upon these lines, circumcision, uncircumcision.

Well, how can we relate this to ourselves? There are, thankfully, many Jews who are coming to faith in Christ, in many parts of the world, and trusting in Him. Should we really think about that? Is He talking just about something which is unimportant to us, unnecessary? Well, as I've said, there are many sorts of division that can enter into a local church.

[ 26 : 46 ] Many reasons for us, perhaps, to have a sense of pride in ourselves and look down upon others because they're not quite the same as us, or see things in the same as us.

There are, of course, those divisions that can come in a local church between the locals and the incomers. Well, they're not really, you know, from our village or town.

You know, they've come from this part or that part. We're the locals. I'm not getting it. Please don't feel I'm getting anybody. I'm using this slightly humorously. There are those who are Yorkshire men and those who are not.

There are those who are university educated and those who are apprenticed. There are those who are the Reformed and those who are the Arminian.

And so it can go on. And yes, there can be a little bit of poking fun at one another about these things, a little bit of chiding one another, but we've got to be so careful that underneath there isn't something lurking which has the sinister taste of pride.

[ 27 : 56 ] Whether we think that we are looking down on or being looked down upon, there is a problem here. There is division. Well, how do we deal with that? How does Paul suggest that we

deal with the problem where divisions can occur in this area?

Well, he says the antidote, verse 20, sorry, the antidote, verse 19, is this, to set our hearts on obedience to God.

Circumcision is nothing. And uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. Being young is nothing. Being old is nothing.

Being educated is nothing. Being uneducated is nothing. What counts is how we live in relation to God's words.

And if we are to ask ourselves, how am I doing in that department of obedience to God, then really none of us can feel a sense of pride, can we?

[ 29 : 01 ] None of us can say, well, we may do. If we do, then we are deceiving ourselves. We may say, I'm doing pretty well in my obedience to God's commands. No, none of us can. If we know our hearts, and the Holy Spirit within our hearts shows us that we are all falling short.

We all get it wrong. We all make mistakes. We all sin. We all fail and foul up. And it doesn't matter where we've come from or what our background is, there's no reason for us to take pride in this area of wholehearted obedience.

The word of God levels us out. There is no reason. There are no rights. There's no position for pride for any of us, dear friends, in the local church.

No reason for us to be divided with one another. Rather, our desire for each of us must be to keep the commands of God and to encourage one another to keep the commands of God.

The second area of discontentment, if I can put it that way, was social, or we may even say economical, when it comes to matter of slaves. Verse 21 through to verse 24.

[ 30 : 11 ] Now, when we think about slavery, we would think, if I had been born into a slave situation, I would do anything I could to get out of that awful bondage.

And yet Paul doesn't encourage that, does he? He says, were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you. Now, of course, our understanding of slavery is very much shadowed and shaped by the slave trade within the UK, Britain, and of course, within the United States as well.

We see it in a very, very bad light, and indeed we should do so. But in the first century, slavery was something very, very common. The majority of the believers to whom Paul writes were slaves.

In fact, the majority of Christians in the early part of the church were slaves who'd come to faith in Christ. And for them, it was much more than a bondage.

It was their employment, it was where they got their food, their clothing, a place of shelter, and there were opportunities for some advancement within the household.

[ 31 : 20 ] Yes, of course, it was far below the blessing of being a free man, a free woman, and it was far from easy or comfortable. But Paul says once more, don't let it trouble you.

Now, he doesn't forbid seeking to gain your freedom. He says there in verse 21, don't let it trouble you.

Although if you can gain your freedom, do so. It was possible for a slave to earn his freedom or to win his freedom or to receive it as a gift from a very grateful master.

And Paul says, if that's possible, great. But don't make it the be-all and end-all of your life. That's the whole thing. It's not as important as you might think. You might think that I must break free.

I must cease to be a slave. But Paul says there's something that you should be much more concerned about than being a slave to a master. And that's being a slave to human thinking, to the thinking and attitudes of the world.

[ 32 : 26 ] Notice what he says in verse 23. You were bought at a price. We've heard that before, haven't we? Right back in chapter 6, verse 20, you were bought at a price. He reminds us again of this truth.

We are not our own. We belong to Christ. Don't become slaves of human beings. Not slaves of human beings in the sense of a slave and a master, but don't become slaves of the human way of looking at things, the worldview of unbelievers, the attitudes, have kept on cropping up throughout this letter, pressing and forcing believers out of the mould of Christ and into the mould of the world. And what is he saying? He says that our lives are not our own. We belong to Christ. We're responsible to God, verse 24. We're to be content in the situation that we're in.

Does he mean that we should never desire to better ourselves? Is he saying that we should not seek to educate ourselves or not seek to forward our career prospects or not to improve upon our circumstances?

He's not saying we mustn't ever do that, but what he's saying is this. To what end are you seeking to improve yourself? To what purpose are you seeking to improve your education?

[ 33 : 52 ] Is it so you can be richer? Is it so you can be more popular? Is it so you can be better respected and more highly thought of? Well, that shouldn't be your concern. That shouldn't be the thing that motivates you in the way that you live.

In fact, what you should be asking is this. Lord, how can I serve you better where I am? How can I live for you in such a way now, in this position which brings glory to your name?

How can you, Lord, help me to live in an unideal situation? Because let's be honest, for many people, many believers, the circumstances in which they live are not ideal, particularly if we think beyond our own four walls and think of those believers in other parts of the world, where it may be the great desire of them, if only I could get out of this country, if only I could be free and go to the west.

Wouldn't my life be so much better? Well, maybe it might be, but at the moment God has you there where he wants you. And it may well be that God has you there where he wants you because that's the place he wants to bring glory to himself through you.

That's the place where you can reach others. That's the place where you can show the faithfulness of God to keep and sustain a believer in a difficult circumstance.

[ 35 : 15 ] And so with this in mind, with this sense of contentment, saying, how can I serve the Lord better? How can I honour him where I am? He turns to the matter of marriage and again of singleness from verse 25 and following.

Really his instruction is the same for the believer in this respect. Be content as you are rather than striving to change your marital or relationship situation.

And then he speaks to a wide variety of people, all of whom will be affected by thoughts of marriage. When he speaks about virgins, he speaks really what he means about young unmarried girls.

Young girls, unmarried girls. That's why later on he talks about unmarried women and a virgin. He means one is older, one is younger, they're both unmarried. So why is his advice to stay?

Verse 26, Because of the present crisis I think that's good for a man to remain as he is, a man or a woman to remain as they are in the relationship situation. Well because the reality is that there are pros and cons to getting married and to being single.

[ 36 : 33 ] Now all of us have this natural tendency, part of our human nature, to think that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. There's an inbuilt covetousness within the sinful heart that says, I want to have what that other person has or what I do not have.

And so, particularly for those who are single, there's a temptation to get married because we think, if only I got married, I'd be so much happier. My life would be content.

My life would be fulfilled. We find that for some young people, not just girls, but boys as well, and for others who get older as well, there's a fixation upon the one thing.

If only I could be in a relationship. This is the one thing that's missing in my life and in fact becomes the thing that occupies all my thoughts and dreams and prayers.

That's why Paul says what he says there about living as those people whose lives are not centred upon just one thing. It seems strange, doesn't it, in verse 29 to our ears when he says, from now on, those who have wives should live as if they do not.

[ 37 : 50 ] Those who mourn as if they did not. Those who are happy as if they did not. Those who buy something are not as dearest to keep. See, what's he saying? He's saying that Christians, husband and wife, should separate and not live together.

What's he saying? He's saying this, really. Are you married? Well, don't live as if nothing else mattered apart from your marriage. Are you sad because you have entered into circumstances in your life which are grievous?

Well, don't let the whole of your thinking be shaped by that one sad event. Are you rejoicing at the moment because things are going well with you? Well, don't let your joy flow just from an outward circumstance and situation but from the Lord.

Have you just bought a new car, a new house, a new coat, a new handbag? Don't make that possession the be-all and end-all of life. Now, isn't that exactly how the world thinks, isn't it?

The world thinks of possessions, acquiring possessions. Christmas particularly is guilty of this as being the joy, the center of joy. People live for the moment, happy now, and then I'm sad.

[ 39 : 02 ] But Paul is saying in all these things, look, don't live like that. Don't live as someone who is so caught up with the things of here and now that you forget the whole point of living for Christ.

That you miss out on the joy and the blessing of following Him. be different to the world around about you. So what does he say?

He points out further reasons why we shouldn't think that marriage is the root of Christian contentment. What does he say? He says this, a husband or wife brings great trouble with them. Okay? If you're going to get married, you're entering into a whole world of trouble. That's not my words, that's his. Those who marry, verse 28, will face many troubles in this life.

Don't hear that very preached on, do you, at a wedding service? I think I might preach on the next time I take a wedding. That would be good, wouldn't it? Those who get married face many troubles in life.

[ 40 : 04 ] What's he saying? Well, he months and he's saying this, when a man acquires a wife, he gets a lot more than he bargained for. And when a wife marries a husband, she gets a lot more than she bargained for.

It's all rosy-tinted and starry-eyed, but when you get down to the nitty-gritty of married life, it's jolly hard work. A lot of people agreeing with that here, I see, which I'm glad.

In other words, as he goes on to talk about it in verses 32 and following, he says, a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world, how he can please his wife. That's so true, isn't it?

What is the one thing that men worry about? Is my wife happy and how can I keep her happy? And again, for a wife, is my husband happy? How can I keep him happy? Well, that's what he's saying. Instead of having just one person to worry about yourself, you've now got two people to worry about. Instead of having to care just for yourself and the concerns of your own life, you've got to be concerned about somebody else and it gets even more so once you have children.

[ 41 : 07 ] And that's much more the case, of course, for the married believer. The married believer is someone who has a primary concern which over and above the concern for their husband, their wife, their children and that's for the Lord.

He says there in verse 32, an unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs, how he can please the Lord. But what happens once he gets married, we're told his interests are divided. The same for an unmarried woman or virgin, concerned about the Lord's affairs, to be devoted to the Lord and so on, but then, again, how can she please her husband?

She's concerned about the affairs of life. There's one driving passion that comes to the heart of someone who comes to faith in Christ. It's this, Lord, what do you want me to do?

How can I live for you and serve you and honour you and glorify you? But what happens when we're married is that we find our devotion is divided. That's often the way. It's much more difficult, isn't it, for couples where one is a Christian and one isn't.

It's very hard. But even as Christians we can find ourselves divided, giving our time to the Lord and to our family. We can often get it wrong.

[ 42 : 21 ] We can often either give too much time to what we think is what the Lord wants us to do, if I can put it that way, church business and church life and church service, and we can neglect our children.

It's particularly a problem from people who are in full-time Christian work. But there can be the other problem as well and that may be the case more so in our day and age is that we give so much time to the family, the important way is that we have no time to serve the Lord.

Both of those things are a problem. Well, what's Paul saying? Is he advocating celibacy for everybody? Is he saying, look, you should never get married, it's a dreadful thing, as some would think?

No, he's not. He's not intimating either that being a Christian who is married means that you do not serve the Lord as you should. He's not saying that being married and a Christian is a handicap to serving God at all.

In fact, oftentimes it can be a very real positive. But really what he's doing is putting the other side of the story. The other side of the story that says Christian marriage is the zenith of the young person's life.

[ 43 : 29 ] Christian marriage is the place and the goal where you should be striving. He's putting the other side. No, it's not. Not necessarily. Paul himself was a single man.

He speaks about that. He was very thankful for that because it gave him a freedom to serve God. And if we are single, it's because at this moment in time God wants us to be that way and we're to use our singleness to serve the Lord.

We've got a great privilege that we are free to serve God with all of our hearts, with all of our bodies, with all of our spirits.

We haven't got the concerns of the affairs of a married woman or a married man. So the challenge is using that time for God, that singleness for Him.

There's no right and wrong, you see, about being married or not. In fact, that comes out again and again, doesn't he? He says, if they marry, you've not sinned. If a virgin marries, verse 28, she's not sinned.

[ 44 : 37 ] It's not about right and wrong, but it is about balance. It is about our individual calling from God. For some of us, we're called to be married. For some of us, we're called to be single.

And so he brings this passage in verse 36 and following, and this is where we're coming to the close. Now, if you've got the NIV, you'll notice that verse 36 and following, there's a big footnote at the bottom.

And that's because commentators and translators are not completely certain who Paul is writing to. Two possible ways of applying this. One is, in the footnotes and maybe in other translations, is talking to fathers who have unmarried daughters.

It's their role to arrange and give their permission for when their daughters should marry. And so the challenge is for the father to marry his daughter off, because that's the expectation, isn't it?

That's what people think. You should get your daughter married off as soon as you can. In one sense, if you think she's getting a bit old and past marriage, then just get her married off. But actually, he's really saying, look, don't be under any compulsion to marry her off.

[ 45 : 58 ] If she's happy to stay single and she doesn't want to get married and you're happy for her to do that, then just leave it be. Don't again be pressurized into the thinking of the world. The other possibility is similar in that it's talking to a young man who's engaged towards a young unmarried girl, a virgin.

That's the translation that the NIV uses here. It's the same sort of thing. He's a young man, he's engaged, and as you know, in Paul's day, engagement was even more strong than engagement today.

It wasn't something that you broke off. If you were engaged and basically it was a fait accompli, you were going to get married very soon. But here's a young man and he is hearing Paul's teaching and he wants to do the right thing before the Lord and he's not sure should he get married.

What will people say after all if he breaks off the engagement? Is he just going through with it to keep his family happy or not? Once again, Paul says, look, you're under no compulsion, verse 37. Settle in your own mind what you're going to do before the Lord. If you think it's right to continue this engagement and you think it's the right thing to do before the Lord to get married, great, do that.

[ 47 : 17 ] But if you don't, that's fine. If you feel that really you should let her be free and yourself be free to serve the Lord, that's great. So he says at the end, verse 38, he who marries the virgin does right, he who doesn't marry her does better.

Christians, we are not to conform to the world's expectations or patterns, but we have a freedom to follow Christ.

And we've got to be very careful, and I say this to myself as a man with an unmarried daughter, I say this to you with perhaps grandchildren or even young people that you know, there can be a pressure from us to say, well, why aren't you married yet?

You're 25, why haven't you got a family yet? Why aren't you settled down yet? And as if we think that is the only way and option for them, and as Christians and in the church, we can put that pressure as well.

For young people, there's enough pressure upon them from their peers getting into relationships, getting into all sorts of situations. rather, dear friends, let us encourage them to be content with where they are and where we are and serve the Lord in that circumstance.

[ 48 : 40 ] And can I speak again to you as we did last week to those of you who've been widowed, who've known the joy and the troubles of being married. Don't feel that you have to remarry.

Don't feel that you have to have a companionship. But at the same time, if you do, it's not a terrible thing. I haven't been in the situation.

Perhaps I never will be. But I can imagine that when a spouse dies, the thought of remarrying can feel like betrayal.

Betraying the memory of the one who we spent so many years with or loved or whatever it may be. But really, what Paul is saying is this. You're free to marry and you're free not to marry.

If you're happy and content in serving the Lord as you are, that's fine. But if there's that pain, if there's that longing and that desire, don't be stopped by expectations of others or of the world.

[ 49 : 41 ] But always, as he puts there, make sure you marry in the Lord. What's the culmination of all of this? What's the secret to happy life?

happy marriage, happy widowhood, happy singleness? Well, the mystery of living in contentment, whatever our situation, comes from recognizing that we are where God has placed us at this time. Recognizing that we are in God's position. If things are to change for us, God will bring that about. He'll lead us in some way.

He'll bring someone across our paths. He'll bring a change in our circumstances. We'll be made redundant, so we have to find a different job or whatever it may be. What he's really saying is this, don't force a circumstance or situation.

Don't be pressurized by your own wrong motivations or by the well-meaning motivations that are wrongly placed of others as well.

[ 50 : 47 ] Don't be forced out of the situation in which you find yourself but rather seek to serve the Lord where you are. And that brings us back to where I read from Matthew chapter 6 because this is, I believe, again, the very principle of Jesus where he sums up talking about striving for, longing for, seeking after all sorts of material things whether that be relationships, jobs, money, and so on.

And he makes this, he makes this comment. Matthew 7, 32, for the pagans run after all these things.

Why do they run after them? Because they think that in them they will find happiness and contentment. Your heavenly Father knows you need them but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

Does God know that you need a wife? Then God will provide a wife. Does God know that you need a different circumstance or situation in your job? Then the Lord will provide that.

Does God know that you need certain finances to make ends meet? God will provide for that. Is the situation that you're in tough and hard at times and pressing?

[ 52 : 08 ] will seek the Lord about it. But be careful not to force something. Most of all make it your goal to seek his kingdom.

well, let's say a couple daar. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen.