

1Corinthians 18-05-13b

Let's continue our study now in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, and we're at verse 21. The overarching principle here is one that we recognize and we've seen before, but it's easy to forget. There is a direction in which happiness flows.

As people who have a dual identity, we are in the flesh, we are in the world, we live in the perceptions of reality that our eyes and our ears give us, but we are also spiritual and we partake of the invisible and the eternal. And happiness flows in a direction from one realm to the other. So which way does it flow? What do you think? Does happiness flow from the spiritual realm into the world of flesh and solid things? Or does it flow from the world of flesh and solid things up into the spiritual realm? Well, you know the answer.

It's one of the wonderful things I learned in naval electricity. I don't even know if they still make them, but there used to be a diode called a Zener diode and you put it into a circuit and it's like a stop valve, a flow valve that lets things go in one direction, but then it backchecks and the electricity can't go the other way. Zener diode is a one-way ticket for electricity to flow in the desired direction.

Well, happiness is in that same way, you and I directional. Our peace, remember last time God has called us to peace, God has called us to self-control, God has called us to remain as we are because changing as we are isn't going to affect our peace, our happiness, or our spiritual fruit. In some cases, it can actually have the opposite effect.

If we try to get married in order to be happy, this is our truism, everybody knows that marriage isn't a way to be happy, marriage is something for happy people to conjoin and share their happiness with each other. But if you're unhappy, you shouldn't get married hoping that it will make you happy. In the same way that if you think any kind of earthly attainment is a path to happiness, listen to what the Hollywood stars say who have attained everything on this earth in terms of money, fame, professional success, all the friends they can wish for or buy or attract, all the drugs they want, all the possessions they want, all the people to cavort with that they want, and at the end of it, they come away with ashes in their mouth, and there are many who have publicly said so.

This is not the way to be happy, in fact it has done nothing but complicate my life. Circumstances will not produce peace, circumstances will not produce happiness, they just don't. You can have stimulation, you can have temporary euphoria, you can be glad in a moment, but the kind of ongoing contentment and joy that we all need doesn't come from circumstance.

So this is essentially Paul's argument here. What circumstance were you in when you were called? If you're going to pursue success as a spiritual creature in God's economy, changing your circumstances is not going to get it. So don't try to get married if you're not, don't try to

get unmarried if you are.

And he's going to go on now here in verse 21, were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it. He doesn't say don't try to be free or don't run away, that's sort of a given. But he says don't let it be a concern.

If you were a slave when you came to Christ, and you're a slave now, changing that circumstance is no way to advance spiritually. And remaining in that circumstance is no impediment. God knew you were a slave when He called you.

If you can be made free, well, make use of it, exercise it. If you suddenly have a potential, if God puts a change in your path, make the most of it. But don't pursue it in the name of spiritual growth or spiritual life.

For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freed man. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. Now this is very illuminating, because we're talking about two different people here, right? And the slave may look over at the freed man and say, wow, you know, if I was in that circumstance, I would be so much happier.

And the freed man may say, like the post-Civil War slaves in this country, back when I was a slave, I had steady environment, I had security, I had provision, I knew what to expect. Now I'm out here and it's a harsh world, and there's a lot of animosity and a lot of bitterness. I was better off as a slave.

Now you can get in trouble for even saying that now in the realm of political correctness. But that's what Paul is saying. He says, don't look over at somebody else's circumstance and say, well, if I was in that situation, I would be happier, or I wish I had that gift, or I wish I had that opportunity.

Because God may have called us in what we view to be a limitation or a hedged-in circumstance, but He gives us freedom somewhere else. Somebody who is free from what we have by way of a limitation is going to be restricted somewhere else. You've heard me say in the past, in my view, when you look around in the world of believers, you can say, well, I don't think that person has a tenth of the challenges that I've got, or I think I don't have a tenth of the challenges that that person has over there.

I believe, based on this passage and others, that it's pretty even. We don't know, when we look at somebody who seems to be stable and well-off and prosperous, what their inner challenges may be, and they may not be ones to talk about it. Some people's challenges are very overt and very visible.

Others are private and inward. I know people extremely well who have had serious battles with depression, and it may even have a chemical basis. There may be some imbalance in your melatonin or whatever it is that goes up and down.

You can wake up on a bright, sunny morning with no serious circumstantial challenges and dread even rolling over and getting out of bed. It is just the blackness of darkness. You feel like there are, you know, Paul Simon said something about angels in the architecture.

Well, you can have the sense that there are demons in the details, that there's something just waiting to overturn you, that you have this unnamed, unknown sense of foreboding that you can't place and you can't explain and that you can't shake. People who have that typically don't want to talk about it, and you cope as best you can. So it is a dangerous thing to look over the fence at somebody who is a slave and say, well, look at the security and the lack of challenges and, you know, autonomy has its downside because you're accountable for everything and there's no net when you fall.

And so the freedman is looking over at the slave and thinking, boy, I wish I was in that situation. The slave is saying, oh, if I was only free, think of what I could do. And he says, look, it balances.

If you're a slave in circumstances, you're the Lord's free man and He's giving you freedom in Christ that you may be able to exercise in ways that actually free people cannot and vice versa. And what does this do? He's taking the circumstance of slavery or being freed from slavery and saying what matters is not whether you are in one condition or the other, but the spiritual reality that defines it and that opens up its potential. If you're a slave, you have the opportunity to be the Lord's freedman.

If you are a freedman, you have the opportunity to be the Lord's slave. Was Paul a slave or a free man? It's kind of a trick question, isn't it? How does he introduce almost every one of his letters? Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

He could have had social prominence and no doubt had access to wealth and comfort and security and he didn't have to be stoned and left for dead. He didn't have to be shipwrecked. He didn't have to be harassed and have mobs and throngs trying to tear him to pieces.

He was the Lord's slave even though he was free. So this calls us to look at any given circumstance, especially those that seem to be a limitation and say, you know, kind of like Job said, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Where he takes away in one area, maybe he has given in another.

And rather than focusing on what we lack or what somebody else has that we would love to have, we look around and find, well, what has God gifted me with that others may not have? He who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. He who is called while free is Christ's slave. What does this sum up in a nutshell? I view my circumstances in light of my relationship with Jesus Christ.

I am either Christ's freedman or I am Christ's slave. If you take Christ out of that sentence, it makes no sense. But our life, whatever it comprises in terms of challenge and opportunity, is defined by the Lord Jesus and our standing in Him.

So, if you are called while a slave, don't trouble yourself about it. If you can be made free, then make use of that. Look at verse 23, you were bought at a price.

Do not become slaves of men. Now is he talking about the literal slavery that was in the preceding couple of verses? Slaves of men means, well, I'm uncircumcised, but if I get circumcised, that will change my standing with people. If I was called to Christ and I was Jewish, but now I'm in a largely Gentile church here in Corinth, well, if I eschew and disavow all of my Jewish connections, that will help me get along with these Corinthians who are suspicious of Judaism.

Or, it will help me in some other way. And he says, don't let what people think dictate what you do. So now we've got two criteria.

The first is, in areas where there is no moral principle involved, whether you are married or unmarried, it's not immoral either way. If you use it as an excuse for licentiousness, now there's a moral issue. If you use it as an excuse to make a change in your circumstances because you think that change is going to make you happy, that's a moral issue.

You were bought at a price. Do not become slaves of men. What price were we bought with? Remember, Peter talks about this.

You were not bought with mere silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. That's what you're worth. And that's who you belong to.

And so everything in life should be viewed in terms of service to the Lord Jesus. Well, I don't have an opportunity for service over here because I'm a slave, or because I'm married, or because I'm unmarried, or because I'm free. I can't be a witness in a household with other servants because I'm not in a household anymore.

I'm throwing out on my own, and I'm having to live under a bridge and try to shine shoes for a living, or whatever it is they did in those days when they were freed. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that in which he was called. With God in that in which he was called.

Don't make changes and justify it with your faith, thinking that that's going to elevate you spiritually or make you more happy and fruitful. It's not. Circumstantial change is something God will bring about in his time and in his way.

And let him figure it out. Paul says, I know both how to be abased and how to abound. I have learned in whatever state I find myself therewith to be content.

Whatever circumstances God brings my way, he's not necessarily euphoric and ecstatic, and he's not necessarily debased and depressed. We have these normal emotional responses, but in whatever state I find myself, therewith to be content. Same here.

Let each one remain with God. Notice how many times he mentions the Lord and God and

Jesus. In verse 17, as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, this is what we've got to keep in mind.

What does God think? What would the Lord have me do? Keeping the commandments of God, verse 19. The calling of God in verse 20. The calling in verse 21.

The Lord is mentioned three times in verse 22. Called in the Lord. He's the Lord's freed man.

Called while free. He's Christ's slave. The blood of Christ, verse 23.

Each one remain with God in that circumstance in which he was called. Don't be looking for a shortcut to spiritual growth. Don't be looking for a shortcut to happiness or contentment or peace.

That comes from God and circumstantial change is a shade. It's a figment. It's a deception.

Now verse 25. We're going to read a few verses here. Concerning virgins, I have no commandment from the Lord, yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in his mercy has made trustworthy.

And notice, he doesn't say, I'm going to give advice because I'm an apostle and the Lord's given me authority. He says, God's mercy has made me trustworthy. And this is a conscious choice of how to couch the weight of his opinion.

He's not dropping apostleship on their head. He's not saying, I've been around and seen it all. What is the basis of his appeal for them to listen to his opinion? I'm trustworthy because the Lord has been merciful to me.

So what I'm about to tell you, you can trust it because I know what God's mercy is. I'm a product of God's mercy. And I am going to communicate something to you that is conditioned by and undergirded with God's mercy.

Do you see it? Here it comes. Concerning virgins. First of all, we've got to figure out what a virgin is.

You'd say, well, I'm pretty sure I know what a virgin is. In this context, it's not quite so simple. I suppose, verse 26, therefore, that this is good because of the present distress that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned.

And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. And stop right there. You see how this flows with what we already covered? In the area where there is no moral principle that dictates what you do.

If you're going and seeing the temple prostitute, you need to make a change and stop. If you're in the process of having an adulterous affair, you need to stop. If you're a fornicator, you need to stop.

If you're suing your fellow believers, you need to stop, etc. But if you're a slave, you don't need to be free. And if you're free, you don't need to crow about that or make a big deal out of that.

Don't be troubled if you're a slave. And don't go awry if you're free. Because you are a Christ slave.

So are you bound? And so I'm going to tell you in advance, just so we can get through this section without a lot of review, that this, after you parse all of the options, this is my understanding of this section. Virgins are betrothed. This is virgin in the sense of the Virgin Mary, betrothed to Joseph.

This is a special category virgin. These are those who are promised. And what has he already talked about? He's talked about people who are unmarried.

He's talked about people who are widows. He's talked about people who are married, either to faithful or faithless people. But what he has not yet addressed is people who have committed themselves in an engagement.

What should we break off the engagement? Joseph considered breaking off his betrothal to Mary when she turned up with child. Right? So there is a category of virgin that is nevertheless not just a young daughter in a household. Concerning betrothed ones is how I would interpret this.

It's not a translation, it's an interpretation. Concerning engaged girls. Because if there's an engagement, there's two people involved, right? She's not engaged to Christ like a Catholic nun.

She's engaged to a guy. So concerning engaged girls, which implies that there's both a fiance and a fiancé. Nobody uses fiancé anymore.

But if you look it up, the girl is a fiancé and the guy used to be a fiancé, because it's like French or something. But now girls will introduce a guy and say, he's my fiancé and nobody bats an eye. It always strikes my ear funny.

But I am careful not to smile. So concerning virgins, i.e. betrothed girls, i.e. engaged couples is how I take this. No commandment from the Lord.

The Lord Jesus didn't say, now, if you're engaged, here's what to do. He said, don't divorce for anything other than pornia, which is a species of apostia. I suppose, therefore, this is good.

Verse 26, because of the present distress. This is the present distress in Corinth. What is the present distress? There is great confusion about what to do in terms of man-woman relations of all kinds.

Evidently, there are those who say, because the spiritual is so separate from the fleshly, we can do what we want with our flesh, and that's one camp. There's a pendulum swing in the opposite direction, extreme. No, we should not do any sex of any kind, not even in a marriage.

We should be chaste and celibate and temperate and avoid each other, and have separate rooms and separate beds from now on, because that's just an invitation to the flesh. Then there are people in the periphery of all of these converts who have opinions, and are wagging their fingers and saying, you need to get rid of that Christian wife you have, or you need to get rid of that Christian husband, or you need to get rid of that faithless husband or wife, or you need to take the kids and get out of there. They're going to grow up and learn to be cult believers or something.

So there is present distress in Corinth because of the radical, moral, and cultural shift in becoming believers. This is how I take this. And it extends to every different area of man-woman relations.

And so now we're talking about the engaged. Now, there are other situations in life that you and I face, and there's a plethora of options. Employment, social activity, you know, is it sinful to be on Facebook? Some of us just say, I have the gift of celibacy when it comes to Facebook, and I don't even have an account, or Twitter or Tumblr, or I've lost track of how many different social media things there are, and I'm a computer guy, and I should know.

But I have divorced myself from all social media. And as you know, I don't even let my family tag me in photographs. I don't want to be on the net.

You can Google Sam Hall, and you'll never see me. And so I'm like the Apostle Paul. I have the gift of no social media, and I am happy and content.

But there's no moral issue. You can Facebook and tweet and tumble and pin your tourists all you want, and it's perfectly fine to each his own. If you grew up with social media and in the cradle you had your thumbs on a screen, God bless you.

If you were called while there was no social media, you can remain as you are, and it's totally fine. But you see what I'm saying? Don't think that this is only related to man-woman relations. But look at what Paul is doing.

He says in every different permutation that you can think of, married or unmarried, widowed, engaged, there's a believer involved, there's an unbeliever involved, or there's a faithful and a faithless. Any way you want to slice this, what dictates? Sometimes the Lord has an explicit command. Well, there you go.

There's a moral issue here. It is immoral for two growing believers to divorce each other. Why would they do that if they're growing believers? They have somehow justified in their minds that this would be a spiritual thing to do.

And the Lord Jesus says it's never the spiritual thing to do if you are two faithful believers. So there's a moral issue. The Lord commands.

Here he says the Lord hasn't spoken on this. There is no moral compass to consult. So what do you do in that circumstance? I have no commandment from the Lord, but the mercy of God will make our judgment trustworthy.

Normally, we can be suspicious of our own judgment. Am I just telling myself this because this is what I really want to do? Am I rationalizing? The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. What does Paul tell us here? If you're a faithful believer and if you are going before the Lord and asking for wisdom, asking and seeking and knocking, the mercy of the Lord will give us trustworthy judgment.

It's a promise. I speak to you as one whom the Lord in his mercy has made trustworthy. God in his mercy will make our judgment trustworthy if we are honest in going before him and asking him and seeking and knocking at the door for his will.

You can't launch a prayer and say, Well, I want to buy a Corvette. And God gives me the desires of my heart. The desire to have a Corvette is something God gave me.

And I was called with a desire for a Corvette. I'm not going to change it. I still want a Corvette.

I'm going to go get a Corvette. I don't want a Corvette, by the way. I am that jaguar that's still parked down at Kong's, though.

That's a sweet-looking car. I couldn't even afford to put an air cleaner on that thing, but I digress. I suppose, therefore, that this is good because of the present distress.

There is stress in this situation. And because of that stress, notice there is not peace. There is not contentment.

There is not the fruit of the Spirit here in self-control. It has become an issue, so much so that they wrote a letter to Paul and said, We need some help with this. This is a problem.

And he says, Because all of this is creating a problem, if it wasn't a problem, just consult with the Lord and follow as the Holy Spirit leads. But there is a problem. There are schisms in the church.

There are factions who are preaching opposite counsel. And because of that present distress, you probably shouldn't make a change. If you are engaged to a girl, then just continue on that course.

In other words, don't let the present distress change what you already committed to and decided. Just because it has created a difficulty doesn't mean you should change. Right? Having a tough time at work? Having a tough time as a midshipman? I was talking to a wonderful gentleman who's got a grandson who's at the Naval Academy.

He just finished his second year, and so I was visiting with him the other day and thinking back to where you are in your career and how much stress there is. The stress is always there, but it changes. The first year, you're afraid you're going to fail and get run out or not meet the standard or whatever.

And then in the second year, the academics kick in, and I was afraid I wasn't going to pass. And then in the third year, all of the professional training kicks in, and you start wondering, you know, the world is open to you. Am I going to go surface lines, submarines, air, Marine Corps, supply? Everything is available, and there's a new kind of stress because the decision you make is going to cut off many other options and send you in one direction.

And you're trying to get exposed and, you know, is this something I can do? Is this something I'd be happy doing the rest of my life? The stress changes, and because of the stress, you might say, well, if I make a circumstantial change, then this stress will go away. And he says, don't react to stress in making your decisions. If you have committed to marrying a girl and you had good reasons for doing so, don't change.

So are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loose. This is still in the area of betrothal. Remember Joseph taking Mary to wife? He didn't change the betrothal because of a circumstance.

Joseph, by the way, was a godly man. Can you imagine God canvassing the earth all down through history and picking the guy that's going to be the Lord Jesus' father after the flesh, raise him in his household? Joseph is a tremendously faithful man. And when this weird circumstance came up, unique in the history of mankind, that his wife is pregnant, not by him, and it's all legitimate.

And he did not break off the betrothal because there was a present distress and rumors. And innuendo that continue to this day. Well, there was a Roman soldier, blah, blah, blah.

Are you bound? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. Not have you been loosed from one, but are you not yet bound to one? Then don't say, well, I've got to get engaged because that's the spiritual thing.

And even if you do marry, you have not sinned. And this is sort of a mirror here. If you are loosed, do not seek a wife.

But if you end up getting married, you cannot be seeking a wife and meet her anyway. I am a fair witness of that. When I went to Dallas, I was going to be a young man of purpose.

And I thought, boy, how great will it be to be single and have an apartment and just focus on my theological studies. I'll get all through and then I'll put my head up and look around. Well, I arrived and met my wife the first day I set foot down there.

And I wasn't seeking a wife. I was planning on not seeking a wife. But one found me anyway,

and praise God.

And he says, even if you do marry, you have not sinned. Well, thankfully so. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

Nevertheless, such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. Now, what is he saying? All of these interpersonal relationships are a part of the present distress. And it isn't going to solve it, getting married.

Marriage is not going to solve the distress. And he says, if you marry, this is another avenue for stress. In-laws, out-laws, and so on.

So, I would spare you. Why does he say spare? What did he say a couple of verses earlier? The mercy of God has made me trustworthy. And as someone who cares for them, he doesn't like to see them go through stress.

If you have a child, if you have loved ones, you know what this is like. You don't want to see your spouse or your child or your parent go through stress. You would spare them if you could.

But if their path leads them into stress, they might say, Well, I wish you didn't have to move, or I wish you didn't have to take on this burden. I wish you didn't have to go through this trial. We would spare them if we could, but God is smarter than we are.

And Paul is just saying, in my view, you have new avenues and areas and opportunities for stress when you're married because you've conjoined. It's like furniture. You used to just have one set of furniture.

Now you've got two. I mean, if you wait as long as we did, we both had a full set of furniture. And there was new stress in trying to figure out what to keep and what to pitch.

You can't integrate two full households of furniture into one house. So it's additional stress. But it was fun stress.

So this I say, look at verse 29. This I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none. And he goes on from there.

Those who weep as though they did not. But what does it mean the time is short? This is a very interesting turn of phrase because, first of all, you have two words for time in Greek. You may remember this.

There's kairos and chronos. Chronos is time, like the passing of time, the time on the clock. Kairos is the word that means those were happy times.

It's a season. It refers to an area of time. So he's talking about a stretch of time that has been foreshortened.

And the word here for foreshortened is sunstelo. Stelo means to wrap and sun means with. So it literally means to wrap up.

The time, the season, is wrapped up. Sunstelo. It's only used one other place in the New Testament.

And you would never guess this no matter how long I stood here and waited for you to guess. You'd never get it. Do you remember in Acts chapter 5 the story of Ananias and Sapphira? Sold a piece of land, brought in some of the money.

Oh, we're just as spiritual as everybody else. We have made a change in our lives that makes us spiritual. We sold some property and we're bringing the money down.

Giving it to the church. Peter says, you've lied to the Holy Spirit. You've misrepresented.

And Ananias falls down dead. What happens immediately after that? Do you remember? A little trivia question here. He's standing there.

Peter talks to him. And he just drops dead. What happens? What do they do with the body? The young men come and sunstelo him and carry him out.

They wrap him up. Sunstelo. It's the only other place.

Acts 5, 6. It says in the King James, they wound him up and carried him out. They wound him up is how it's translated. And you can translate that here.

The season is wound up. It's winding up. Now, how can that be? This was nearly 2,000 years ago.

So if you think, well, he's saying the rapture is so near, there's no point in getting married or thinking too far ahead because you should be out there cutting a hole in a sheet and jumping and waiting to rise and meet the Lord in the air. That's kind of what it sounds like. And it's been taken that way traditionally and historically.

It's not what he's talking about. What happens when you are saved and you are growing and you are looking at the Word of God and getting God's perspective? What is the triad of Christian virtues? What are the three things? Faith, hope, and love. We know what faith is.

We've been talking about pistia and apostia, believing what God says and living in its light. We know what love is, sacrificial toward self, beneficial toward others. What is the hope? I am constantly thinking about the judgment seat of Christ.

I am constantly thinking about meeting the Lord in the air. I am constantly thinking about how thick that robe of righteousness is likely to be based on the way I live. We are constantly living in the light of the return of the Lord.

So what has happened? The Lord is going to return when the Lord is going to return. And no man knows the day or the hour. The Son of God doesn't know it.

Only the Father knows. But in what sense has this season in which we live been wrapped, been foreshortened, been wound up? What used to be an opaque fog of the future has lifted. Your unbelievers and your faithless believers have no perception of what is coming over the horizon.

You think about looking through your windshield on a foggy drive and the headlights just illuminate the whiteness and you can't see what's coming ahead. What has God done for us? What does our hope do? This is a momentary light affliction that is working for us an eternal weight of glory. Remember that? This momentary light affliction.

Our life, Paul says, is momentary. Our testing is light. The affliction is minor compared to the eternal weight of glory.

I always, without fail, I'm so glad I grew up in the analog age of vinyl albums and 78s because every time I think of that passage, your momentary light affliction, I think about the needle moving in a groove, how small and infinitesimally microscopic that movement is, that vibration. But when it travels along wires and goes into a preamplifier and from there to an amplifier and from there to a speaker and you've got Bose 901s with 9 drivers times 2, 18 4-inch drivers up there, powered by your 200-watt per channel stereo amplifier, that infinitesimally small vibration is magnified into something that can crack glass and almost literally give you a nosebleed. Your momentary light affliction, these small things, have enormous, unimaginably huge consequences.

And just because you can't yet hear the speakers doesn't mean the needle is not in the groove. You're recording the album right now with these little tiny wiggles, it's going to get played to a stadium-sized crowd. So in what sense has the kairos, the season, been shortened? What happens in this life in terms of its circumstantial importance has been so greatly diminished.

This season has been smallified. It's not that the chronological time has been shortened and Jesus is just around the corner. What he's saying is this season of circumstance is a very low importance.

We are looking beyond that and we are thinking about and reflecting upon and preparing for and anticipating with eagerness that eternal weight of glory with Christ. And so he says, don't sweat your circumstances when they're very small. They're wrapped in a little sheet and everything else is outside it.

It's the body of Ananias. And he's going to continue, look at what he goes on to say. So that even those who have wives should be as though they had none.

Now, this is the same Paul in Ephesians says, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. No man ever yet hated his own flesh. He's not saying act like you're not married and don't talk to anybody when you come in the door.

What is he saying here? How would you act as though you don't have a wife when you do? You don't let your marriage or the status of your marriage impinge on your focus on eternity. You should be just as focused on the return of the Lord and all of the subsequent kingdoms to come as if you weren't married. Don't let marriage dim your view of the future.

He's not saying don't act like you're married in all of the normal ways. When it comes to perspective, when you recognize that the time is small, the season is short stuff, it's a mowed lawn. You're just going to walk across that and get into the tall cotton of the eternal future.

It's inconsequential when you look at eternity. So, those who have wives should be as though they had none. In other words, don't be any less focused on the future than somebody who isn't married.

And those who weep as though they did not weep. He doesn't say they should stop weeping and he doesn't say they should stop being married. It should be no impediment.

You're still going to be married and your life is largely consumed in your partnership as you go through all of these wonderful ups and downs. But when it comes to looking ahead, the kairós, the season, you should be no less interested in it than somebody who is free of that particular area of endeavor. Same thing, we sorrow, but our sorrow doesn't dim our hope.

Those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice. Don't let your rejoicing distract you from what is coming. Those who buy as though they did not possess.

Don't get so wrapped up in your motorcycle that you're riding it instead of spending your time in the things that count spiritually. Why did I say motorcycle? Is that one of my Freudian slips? And those who use this world as not misusing it. You're going to operate in the world, but don't let that get out of balance.

Why? The form of this world is passing away. You see the connection? The time is short, and the form of this world is passing away. That's synonymous.

That's two ways of saying the same thing. These circumstances, whether you're a slave or free, whether you're married or unmarried, whether you're engaged or not, whether you're widowed or not, whether you're circumcised or not, these are short little stubs in a season that is quickly going to end from the standpoint of eternity. Verse 32, I want you to be without care.

If these things begin to cause you to stumble, what are we supposed to do with cares? Got to remember your verse for that, don't we? Casting all your care upon Him? For He careth for you. What happens to the seed that falls among the thorns in the parable of the soils? The thorns and thistles grow up and choke the word, and when Jesus interprets that for His disciples, He says it is the cares of this life choke out the word. Cares, choke it out.

Choke out the fruit. Choke out the production. I want you to be without care.

He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, how He may please the Lord. Now, this is the word merimnao. M-E-R-I-M-M-A-R-I-M-N-A-O.

Merimnao, this is the word that means cares. Now, He just got through saying, I would have you without care, and He says the one who is unmarried cares about the things of the Lord. Well, is Paul saying he doesn't want them to care about the things of the Lord? Yes.

Does that surprise you? Did you always think, well, this is a good argument for not being married because you can just focus all of your attention on the Lord? He says, I want you to be without care. Up above, He said, I would spare you. I don't want you to be pressed.

I don't want you to be under pressure. I don't want you to be distressed. And He said, your area of stress is just going to be in a different area if you change your circumstances.

And He says, he who is unmarried merimnaos about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. And you can turn this into a sin. You can be so worried about whether you're doing your spiritual life right that you get into sinful worry about whether or not you're spiritual enough.

Well, I wonder if I ought to go to the mission field. Well, I wonder if I ought to give more money to this ministry. Well, I wonder if I ought to... Maybe I'm not spending enough time in prayer.

Maybe I'm not... I mean, it's a healthy thing to examine ourselves. It's a healthy thing to be as fruitful and be as pleasing to the Lord as we can be, but not when it crosses into worry. You can have a sinful worry about your spiritual life.

If you don't confess your sins and let them go, you can get into sinful worry about your failures because of what they do to your spiritual life. And you say, well, how can I be wrong to worry about my spiritual life? Paul says it right here. If you are unmarried, that just gives you more opportunity to get into sinful worry about your spiritual life.

If you are married, is worrying about the things of the world, how he may please his wife. This is why he said earlier, if you're married, you should live as though you're unmarried. Don't let concern for your wife overwhelm your spiritual life.

You've got to keep your eye on the prize. You've got to keep your eye on the kingdom. You've got to keep your eye on the future.

Forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. And if you start getting into sinful worry over it, it doesn't matter what your circumstance is. And if you get into sinful worry about your wife and your marriage, and you don't cast your cares on him, worry in this context, everywhere it occurs, is a bad thing.

Paul says, I don't want you worrying. I don't want you in distress. I don't want you occupied with care.

Even if it is care for the things of the Lord, you can overthink your spiritual life. How he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin.

The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. She who is married cares about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. Well, he's not saying one is better than the other, because he's just got through saying there's no advantage to being unmarried than there is to being married.

But then he seems to contradict himself, if you take it the traditional way. All you have to remember to keep this passage straight is *merim nao* is viewed as a sin here. There is a moral component that says you are not to worry.

And you can justify, the ascetics were saying, well, if we just avoid all sexual contact whatsoever, it's good for a man not to touch a woman, and they're worrying about it. And they're challenging their self-control with it. And it is becoming a sin to try to be so spiritual.

You can't get into sinful worry, even when you think, well, but the object of it is good. Can you get into sinful worry about a loved one? Yes. Parents that let their kids out the door and go live their lives, you worry over them.

And you can't. You have got to let that go and commit it to the Lord. You can worry about your spiritual life.

People worry about whether they're spending enough time at the church, and whether they ought to go on Wednesday night, whether they ought to go down and volunteer for this, and get involved in that, and oh, they're having a new this, and they're starting a new that, and should I be involved? If you worry about the things of the Lord, you can be just as sinful as if you're worrying about a spouse or a child. Unmarried woman cares about, worries about, is the word here. It's *merim nao*.

Worries about. How she can be holy both in body and in spirit. She who is married has a different area of worry.

And any area of worry is sinful. It doesn't matter how good the object is. So this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

Worry is distracting. God has called us to peace. Does it make sense? It's an odd thought that you can try to be too spiritual.

You can try too hard. You can worry too much. If any man thinks he's behaving improperly toward his virgin, notice his virgin, his betrothed.

If she's past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin, let them marry. He who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, has power over

his own will, is so determined in his heart that he will just maintain a betrothal and not go forward into marriage, he does well.

He who actually marries does well, but he who does not, and notice that give in marriage does better, and they've said, well, this is the father and the daughter. There's no hint of fathers here, and basically the two forms of the word for marriage mean the same thing, and you can worry too much about the slight change in verb here. He's just saying anything that's going to produce worry, don't do it.

If you're going to worry about it, if it's going to raise the stress level, don't do it in the name of spirituality. Wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives. If her husband dies, she's at liberty to be married to whom she wishes in the Lord.

She's happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment, and I think I also have the Spirit of God. And this is back to the original theme. Don't let circumstances dictate your happiness.

Don't let it dictate your priorities, and don't let it drive your decisions. What should drive our decisions is what promotes peace to the extent that is possible and up to you. Live in peace with all.

God has called us to peace. The least stress is going to lead you in the right direction. The fruit of the Spirit is going to lead us in the right direction.

What do I need to change that's going to enhance my spiritual life? Probably not much. Pursuing in the circumstance we have is Paul's recommendation. If something comes in our path to make a change, God will bring it.

If you're unmarried, remain as you are, but if you marry, you've not done wrong. And notice he says God's mercy has given him good judgment, and he says, I think I have the Spirit of God. This is where we turn for our good judgment.

Look to the mercy of God. What is part and parcel of God's mercy? What is a part and parcel of the fruit of the Spirit? What is a part and parcel that does not challenge our self-control, does not raise the stress level for ourselves and others, causes the least collateral damage? Don't make a change in the name of spiritual things unless there is a moral component to it. Otherwise, leave it be.

Let God introduce the circumstantial change. That's this in a nutshell. And it transcends marriage.

It transcends interpersonal relationships. It applies in every area of our life. Well, that brings us to Chapter 8. I took an extra five minutes here, but we're at a good place to start next time.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word and the light

that it shines on our path. It is wonderful to have the promises and the principles and the doctrines of your word that are so transcendent and so much more applicable and powerful than a large book of rules or specific guidance for each and every circumstance in our lives.

We thank you for your Holy Spirit who takes these truths and helps us see their pertinence and their bearing on the circumstances we face. And we pray that as we look at our own lives that these guiding principles will be manifest, be evident, and that we can see our way clear to living the life to which you have called us and maximize the potential of the circumstances that we find ourselves in, that we can be a blessing to those around us. We can shine a light in the midst of a dark generation.

We can reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus both now and in the ages to come, which are ever nearer and in the light of which our present circumstance is greatly shortened. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.