

Part Two - Sex, Marriage & Singleness

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[0 : 00] Let me pray. Let's ask for the Lord's help as we look together at this chapter.! Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much that this process that we're engaged with now of looking at your word, thinking about it, and seeing how it applies to us today, is a process in which you are deeply invested and thoroughly involved by your spirit.

Thank you that it is your spirit who inspired these words, so these are your words, not just Paul's words. And thank you that your spirit is now at work in our hearts, so that not only we might understand them, but that we might be able to live by them and apply them and see their relevance and meaning to us today.

And so we pray, amidst maybe all the other things that are going on in our minds and our hearts, may just the wonder of what you have done and are doing and will do by your spirit might just captivate us this evening as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

So if you're just joining us for the first time this evening, you find us in the middle of a three-part series on sex, marriage, and singleness from 1 Corinthians 7.

Now let me be very clear, just to lower your expectations from the very outset, is that we are not trying to cover everything that the Bible has to say on sex, marriage, and singleness.

[1 : 22] There is a place for that, I guess. It's a very long series, much longer than three parts, but that is not what we're trying to do tonight. It's all right, Lucy, nobody noticed.

All I'm trying to do is just take a deeper look at one chapter of the Bible. But the reason for doing that is not because I'm trying to be lazy about looking at the rest of Scripture. Rather, I think it's because our situation is not that dissimilar to the Corinthian situation.

And although we've got a bit of work to do to understand the passage, you will find as we look at it, we don't have to do any work to make it relevant. In other words, a sort of a sex-worshipping, promiscuous culture is not a modern invention.

In fact, if anything, it is a return to a pagan society or a pagan culture. It's ancient. And what we find is we are consistently moving back in that direction.

And so we find ourselves in a situation which is very similar to ancient Corinth. And so knowing how Paul pastored people in that situation, how he helped them in it and live amongst it, is really, really helpful for us.

[2 : 35] And I'm going to begin by reading the chapter to you, because I know that some of you weren't here last week. And that will be a good reminder for us. I'm going to read it fairly quickly, so follow along in your Bibles.

You might not understand all of it. In fact, we discovered last week that there are significant chunks of it which are quite difficult to understand. And we're going to come to some of those this evening. But let's just read it so it's familiar to us.

Now, for the matters you wrote about... So this is him responding to a report that he's had back from the Corinthian church. Now, for the matters you wrote about... It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband.

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but yields it to his wife.

[3 : 35] Do not deprive each other, except perhaps by mutual consent for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again, so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all of you were as I am, but each of you has your own gift from God. One has this gift, another has that.

Now, to the unmarried and the widows, I say it is good for them to stay unmarried as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

To the married I give this command, not I, but the Lord. A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest, I say this, I, not the Lord. If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.

[4 : 39] And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.

Otherwise, your children would be unclean. But as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances.

God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? 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 become circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

[5 : 44] Were you a slave when you were called? Do not let it trouble you. Although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who is a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person. Similarly, the one who is 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 commandment from the Lord, but I give judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. Because of the present crisis, I think that it is 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 have not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

But those who marry will face many troubles in this life. And I want to spare you this. 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.

[6 : 46] Those who mourn as if they did 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 the world as if not engrossed in them.

But 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. I am 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.

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

[7 : 48] He is 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, but he who does not marry her does better. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is free to marry to anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is, and I think that I too have the Spirit of God. Now, I know that there's a whole load of things now washing through your mind that you have heard in that chapter, in that section, and some of them we dealt with last week, some of them we're dealing with this week, some of them we'll deal in the following week, and others of them you'll just have to go and wrestle with yourselves in your own time, or you can come and ask me some more questions if you'd like to, and I'll try and help you out.

Now, last week we were a little bit too ambitious. I'm apologies for that. I'm going to try and be more modest in my expectations this week, but let me start with a brief recap. We dealt with the issue of sex last week, and I tried to show you two false views of sex, two views that the Corinthian church had or were around in Corinth that were wrong, and then tried to show you what the right view was from 1 Corinthians.

Let me give you the false views again, just very briefly. Both false views of sex were based on the same assumption. The assumption was that the body is separate from the real us.

[9 : 28] So you have, thought the Corinthians, your body and your mind or your soul, your thoughts, your dreams, your aspirations, and your intellect. This is Plato's idea, right?

And the mind is higher and more important, and the body is lower and less important. So Plato thought it was great when you died because you were separated from your body, and that was much better, so he thought.

And in the world, that idea thought, well, okay, if your mind is more important than your body, then, said the world, well, it doesn't actually really matter then what you do with your body. You can go do whatever you like with your body.

And so actually, the city of Corinth was set up in such a way to facilitate a lifestyle which involved using sex and sexuality in all sorts of varied ways, and dreadful ways, in order for them just to meet their bodily desires.

Now, that same separation, though, was present not just in the Corinthian city, but it was also present in the Corinthian church. So if the world thought, oh, well, our body is lower than our minds, it doesn't really matter what we do with our body, we can just do whatever we like with it, and there's no moral consequences.

[10 : 40] In the church, the view was, well, actually, if our minds are more important than our bodies, then really our bodies are probably dirty and sinful and wicked.

And so to die is to be separated from them, and God's not really interested in our bodies. And so, therefore, it's really important that we don't indulge our bodies in any way.

And so, as you read at the beginning of the chapter, the church was teaching that even in marriage, you shouldn't have sex. And that's what was being taught in the church, and Paul confronts that.

Now, I hope you see, just before we unpack this a little bit, I hope you see that that false distinction is still alive and well in our culture today. There's a lady called Nancy Piercy who's written a book called Love Thy Body, which I think I've quoted before, and it makes a really compelling argument for the idea that lots of contemporary attitudes to sex, to gender, to sexuality, to abortion, and to euthanasia are all built on this idea of separating our bodies from the real us.

So, we should just let our bodies do what they want to do, because the real us is separate to that.

Now, let me show you a way that's not related to sex that you see that.

[11 : 53] You see that, don't you, in the idea that the mother's emotional well-being is to be preferred over the physical well-being of the unborn child. And so, of course, it goes without saying that abortion is right, doesn't it, in that setting?

Because the body of the unborn child, which has really very little independent thought as yet, of course is subservient to the mind or emotions or feelings of the woman.

But contemporary sexuality is the same, isn't it? We are taught sexuality not by looking at our bodies, but by thinking what we really desire and feel like.

And that's what contemporary sex education in schools is all about, isn't it? It's about how you think and feel about yourself. And so, the assumption is that our bodies have nothing to teach us about what they are for or why they have been made in the way they have been made.

And so, when Paul tells the Corinthians, no, actually, listen, it's not just that the world is wrong about using sex in all sorts of different ways. They are wrong to separate your mind from your body.

[12 : 58] Then we need to listen to that too, don't we? Paul says at the end of chapter 6 that you are not your own, you are bought at a price, he says. Chapter 6, verse 19 and 20.

He says that not about their minds, but about their bodies. He says Jesus rose from the dead, physically rose from the dead. Your bodies will be with the Lord Jesus.

You will be raised from the grave because God is interested in your body. And so, Christian spirituality is not to pretend that we're less than bodies and minds.

And so, Paul says it is not spiritual for a couple who are married to not have sex. In fact, it is the opposite. It is good for them to have sex in marriage and not just for the purpose of procreation, but for the purpose of building their marriage and their love for one another.

Okay, so that's the first thing, the false views of sex. Any questions or comments on that before I move on? All look slightly dazed. Okay? You can come back to me in a moment when I've done the positive views as well.

[14:06] So, Paul then, and we saw this in a super rush last week, gives three positive views or instructions regarding sex. One is that sex is made for marriage.

Right? So, marriage wasn't given to sort of regulate sex. Rather, sex is given for the purpose of building strong marriages. Strong sexual desire is not a fault in humanity. It's rather for the purpose of building marriage.

Our struggle is that our sexual desires are disordered and disconnected from our covenant of marriage. And so, we're unfaithful to our promises. And the problem isn't with God's design.

Sex is good for marriage. The second instruction that we found is that sex in marriage is to be other person-centered. So, in Corinthian culture, as in Western contemporary culture, sex is essentially selfish.

It is driven by our desires. And Paul's radical idea is this giving of oneself to another. So, the husband's body is not his own. It belongs to his wife. The wife's body is not her own. It belongs to the husband's.

[15:10] That's not meaning that they are to demand their own personal fulfillment, but they are to surrender their desires to one another in love. Of course, let me just say, that is why the assumption of Paul is that sex is for marriage.

Right? Because separating sex from the covenant of marriage is not just immoral.

It's sort of, to use my favorite word again, an oxymoron. Right? It's a contradiction. Because to separate sex from marriage is to say something with your body that you're not willing to say with your mind or your heart.

Right? So, what you're saying when you get married is you are pledging yourself to another in faithful covenant love. Right? You give yourself to them.

That's what's going on in sex. You're doing that physically. And to separate those from one another as if they could be separated is a contradiction in the Bible. It's saying with our bodies, I give myself fully to you.

[16:16] Oh, but by the way, I don't love you enough to make that promise publicly or to tell anybody about it. Which, of course, is a terrible contradiction. Likewise, for the married person to say, I give myself to you publicly, I'm going to declare that and say that, but I'm not going to do that physically.

Well, that is also a contradiction too. The next week, we saw that sex is to be subject to self-control. We went through the chapter and saw that disordered sexual desire is not just the struggle of a few, but of us all.

And so sexual desire needs to be controlled and not just pursued, not only for the single person, but also for the married person, because their body is not their own. So they can neither demand sex nor deny sex based purely on their own desires, but are rather to exercise self-control and other person centeredness.

Okay. Now you can ask any more questions if you've got them. That was a quick whistle through last week. Any questions or comments? Yeah, go for it.

Can I repeat the question? So if someone has multiple sexual partners outside of marriage, is that essentially gathering husbands? I think, in a way, but marriage in the Bible is never less than a public commitment to one another that everybody knows about.

[17:45] So it is not possible to get married on your own in private without anybody knowing about it, not in the Bible's understanding. And so to have multiple sexual partners outside of marriage is not to collect husbands.

It is to disconnect two things which are meant to be put together. And, of course, one of the things that's really clear in 1 Corinthians, we should just look back at 1 Corinthians 6, verse 11.

And he's gone through a whole list of different wickednesses that are going on in Corinth. And he says, and that is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

We have a God who is able to redeem whatever our sexual history is. And that's really brilliant, isn't it? That's really great news for all of us.

Okay. Any other questions? Any other questions? Any other questions? Any other questions? yeah yeah that's an assumption this sorry oh the second false assumption so the first one was you so I can't remember how are you going to remember it and I can't remember other purchase other person centered was that the second one yeah second one was other person centeredness yeah yeah yes okay so about how God redeems our past is that the question yeah so how does God redeem our past so I think one of the the central idea of the gospel is that God is not thwarted by our sinfulness but is able to save and redeem and rescue and in a way it is the areas in which I have experienced brokenness and sin and my own sin and the sin of others it is in those places that I experienced the balm and comfort and healing of the gospel even the most acutely and generously um there's a really great uh stuff in in Augustine about where he talks about will we will we know that we were sinners in glory so when we get to heaven will we remember sin is his question and he says he distinguishes between uh he talks about sickness there's two ways of knowing about being sick right you know about being sick one as a patient and the other as a doctor right so the patient knows sickness because they know what it's like to feel sick the doctor knows what it's like to be sick because they know how to heal sickness right and he talks about sin in the same way we know sin now as sinners but we will know sin as those who have been healed from it and rescued from it so it's not that we will forget all sin but our sin will be a reminder to us of the goodness of the lord jesus who is the great doctor we in glory jesus has the marks of the cross and we're not going to go oh why does he why why did why does he have holes in his hands right we we're going to go those were for me that that's my healing there and i've experienced that in all these ways all the ways i was broken all the ways i was broken by other people i've experienced his healing and his grace to me yeah martin yes great so what about verse 33 where we're concerned about the effect is it yeah okay so how does that work how does undivided devotion work that is exactly what we're coming on to talk about martina so thank you we'll move on and we'll get to it is that all right yes yes i think it is assumed if you have a health thing that is preventing you from having sex in marriage that is okay i would have thought i think he's and what sorry just if you just don't want to well yeah okay we can talk about that in a minute i think

[22 : 45] the thing is um are you sinning by refusing we had i had an interesting conversation with someone about that this week uh the answer is no and possibly yeah so because i think so i think what it's saying here is it's not right is it for a husband or a wife to demand sexual intercourse from their husband or their wife and it's not right just to deny it just for your own sex because you're you're it's about self-giving isn't it one another and so for the husband who says he knows his wife's not feeling very well and that she's really tired and that she's got a terrible headache and to demand that is for him to disobey one corinthians seven right so it's not it's not yeah so it's not saying that um yeah seven five talking about it yes yeah yeah that's what we're saying uh first five no repentance needed is a question well i don't know because each individual situation is going to be different isn't it martina and i i don't propose that i know all of that but yeah sorry i didn't i meant nathan sorry yeah okay right let's move on before anyone gets we can we can just not upload the sermon that's fine more people will come next week now let's let's move on to talk about marriage and then next week we're going to talk a bit more about singleness and someone's going to help me out next week as a special guest and you can find out who that is next week if you come so let's talk about marriage and i want us to talk specifically about a blocker that came up in our discussion last week which is in verses 25 to 31 i was going to read it for you again i'm not going to read the whole thing just for the sake of time but if you look down at verse 26 you will see he says because of the present crisis i think that it is good for a man to remain as he is and the kind of question that came up last week is what is the present crisis what is the present crisis a theologian called thistleton who has written the kind of go-to commentary on one corinthians spends pages and pages and pages on this circling around the various different views and uh i've read through it so you don't have to and essentially the question is is there something specific going on in corinth that led paul to give these instructions or is it something more general his answer wait for it after pages

and pages is both right so essentially what he's saying is that there are a number of political and natural disasters and significant events going on in the life of corinth at times so things like famine changing empires and changing rule and political tension and all that sort of thing which could be what paul has in mind with the present crisis but the context actually makes it clearer that we don't need to really know specifically what paul is talking about because the present crisis in verse 26 i think is exactly the same meaning as when he says the time is short in verse 29 which is exactly the same as what he means in verse 31 when he says this world in its present form is passing away so that means that whether there was a specific situation in corinth whether it be famine or political upheaval those specifics really just are the location of a greater significance of the fact that this world is passing away and time is short our lives are short and jesus is coming back and so that's what's lying behind 1 corinthians 7 and so what i want to do this evening is just give you three big theological events which are shaping what paul is saying here about marriage and then we'll come on and think about how they unpack the detail so the first event that goes on and it's lying in the background of 1 corinthians is creation so we are all creatures we are all made by god we are enlivened flesh breathed into by god himself and that means that we have like we have seen desires inbuilt into us desires not just for sex but desires for food for companionship for community and for life and in a pre-fall world of genesis 1 and 2 we as creatures lived with those desires in happy harmony with the moral order that god had given so sam so samuel adam's sexual desire for eve and eve's desire for adam matched their covenant with each other and the bible's really clear they were both naked and they felt no shame now then the fall happens in genesis 3 and we'll think more about that in a moment but the fall does not make us less than creatures yes it messes us up and yes it messes the world up it disconnects desire from faithfulness but it does not eradicate our humanity and so paul says to the corinthian church your view of sex and marriage needs to understand that you are still human that you are still creatures you still made in the image of god you are still made in this world and for this world you will still fall in love you will still want to get married and that desire is not wrong it's created in you by the god who made you and even though we understand the fall and redemption that's ours in jesus paul is still very clear that we mustn't pretend we're not creatures and so any church or the corinthian church or anyone in the corinthian church that says marriage is is ungodly well they're wrong aren't they so the desire to marry is not a wrong thing that idea gets repeated over and over again verse 28 marriage is not sin verse 36 desiring marriage is a good thing a desire that it's okay to follow verse 38 getting married is doing right so marriage is a good thing right we are created for intimate companionship with another person of the opposite sex that is built into us marriage is a creation institution designed for humanity and that is in us and it's given for our good for god's glory and we are nothing less than that in the present but the second theological event that paul wants you to remember which shapes his teaching here is the fall look again at verse 28 down verse 28 if you do marry you have not sinned and if a virgin marries she has not sinned but those who marry will face many troubles in this life and i want to spare you this really paul here is just echoing genesis 3 when god says to the woman that her desire will be for her husband and he will rule over you in other words what he's saying there is there's going to be tension between adam and eve between a husband and a wife so his loving self-giving rule will become domineering and her desire will be to usurp him and come over him and that's a result of the fall and sin entering the world and the effect of us losing the freedom of the garden and being bound in our sin means that says paul marriage becomes really really hard work it's it's trouble he says many troubles and i want to spare you this sorry if i'm sounding too passionate about that okay so basically the point is says paul don't be naive don't be naive about marriage he said marriage is is two sinful people locking themselves together in an institution that is designed by god to last the rest of their lives with no room for escape right so that is going to be really really hard work and who wants that says paul so you know if you'd like to get married don't have rose-tinted spectacles about it says paul it's not easy paul is also realistic isn't he that sometimes marriages end so they can end in divorce and he's really clear that the christian shouldn't initiate uh divorce shouldn't leave their partner but he is still really clear that an unconverted partner who finds themselves married to a new believer might not be able to handle that i think it's worth saying that paul is clear that it's believers should marry other believers he's really really clear on that uh in verse 39 so that if you're looking for a marriage partner you should look for another christian and we'll talk a bit more about that in a moment but it seems to be in the middle of the section that there are some people who become christians and their partners

have not what does he say verse 15 but if the unbeliever leaves let it be so the brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances god has called us to live in peace how do you know wife whether you will save your husband or how do you know husband whether you will save your wife so paul is really realistic marriage is going to be difficult and painful and in a sinful fallen world people won't always be faithful to their promises but it's not just the fall brings sin it also brings death and widows get mentioned throughout 1 corinthians 7 perhaps this is more of an issue for the church then because life expectancy was lower but the truth that paul is engaging with is that because of the fall what you desire to be permanent will be temporary it is until death parts us and death comes to us all and so every marriage has an end date and to enter marriage without thinking about that is short-sighted because we live in a world of sin and death that brings us then to the final theological reality so we need to remember we are creatures and created we will fall in love we will desire to be with another person but we are fallen creatures so that very desire and marriage yourself will be very difficult but the third reality is redemption look down at verse 32 and here we come to martinez sorry to a random person's question that was asked from the back um i would like you to be free from concern verse 32 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 i'm not saying this for your sorry i am 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 here the idea is isn't it that in this fallen world that god has created there is a plan of god to redeem that's the lord's affairs if you like in verse 32 and verse 34 god says paul is on a mission he's on a mission to save people to rescue people from a world of sin and death and bring them into a new creation a recreated world and it's in that new creation recreated world entered through the redemption that's found in christ jesus alone not this world that all our creaturely desires will be fully met in other words it's in that world that your desire for for intimacy for community for uh for companionship and for affection they will be fully met there and then you will never be fully satisfied in this life either as a married person or as a single person

but only in new creation through redemption we know there's just a purely kind of physical level we know that our desire for life and to live exceeds our body's abilities to keep going doesn't it no when somebody dies even in a good old age there is still grief and sadness at their passing isn't there because you wanted them to live for longer because we weren't designed for dying right we weren't designed to handle the emotion of dying because we weren't meant to die death comes through the fall and so actually our desire for life that we have now will never be fully satisfied here but only in recreation and and the same says paul for our desire for intimacy with one another it will always be broken and marred and scarred in this world and it will be only fully fulfilled in the world to come our desire for community will always be damaged by our sinfulness or the sinfulness of others misunderstandings miscommunication the fact that we're all just a little bit of awkward characters but in the new creation when we are done with sin we will find that our desires for companionship with one another are fully met and so that means that because there's a plan of redemption the the plan of god in in genesis 1 and 2 of filling the earth and subduing the earth is not the only mission that's going on in the world in fact says paul that mission that creation mandate to fill the earth and subdue it takes second place to the great commission of go and make disciples of all nations and so that says paul has big implications for how you view marriage and singleness for that mission and for usefulness in that mission paul seems to think that singleness rather than marriage is to be preferred and we'll consider the detail of some of that next week not that marriage is therefore sinful and to be avoided by everybody because actually we are still human and we still fall in love and it's still right and good for us to do those things but that actually even as those people who fall in love and get married we should still be thinking about the plan of redemption and god's mission to take the gospel around the world so let's just try and think about how those three theological pillars apply to our lives and our situation number one i think it means be realistic please don't try and live as if you are less than or more than a creature do not over spiritualize your singleness or your marriage don't pretend that you're not a real person actually it is it is right and good if you're single to desire to be married it's a it's an okay thing to pursue that or to want that but also don't try and live like there's no fall don't be naive don't think that sin is not a temptation or don't think somehow that salvation will come through marriage if only you marry the right person all my problems will go away that's not true is it what paul says here is true that when you get marriage you will inherit a whole

load of problems that you didn't have before you were married what he says don't think marriage will be easy it won't be paul uh trip who's the uh christian counselor runs a biblical counseling charity in the u.s says marriage is yeah what do you think he says next marriage is his answer is war right and you say oh my goodness war that sounds terrible it's like you're fighting all the time and then he says but but not not war with each other marriage is a war against your sinfulness he says because your sinfulness and your brokenness is going to be kind of amplified in your marriage and so actually we need to be realistic and finally don't live as if redemption is not god's big and glorious plan it might be that you don't end up in either the marriage that you would love to have been in or you end up single when you didn't want to be or you end up with the marriage that you really enjoyed being over more quickly than you hoped it because your partner passes away but don't think that therefore all your dreams are dashed all your hopes are gone because there is a greater plan in this world than marriage well it's a different marriage really isn't it because the lord jesus is our groom and we will be with him eternally and everything good enjoyable glorious brilliant about marriage will be ours in him and that means that there is nothing good about marriage that will be denied to any christian in eternity it will all be ours to experience in our relationship with the lord jesus so don't live as if the plan of redemption is not big and glorious but don't live as if the plan of redemption is not really really important now ultimately it's so important isn't it it should shape the decisions that i make even about these really big items in life you know the person that i marry if i do marry should help me to trust christ and tell others and not hold me back right if it's possible isn't it to marry somebody who encourages me as a christian and who spurs me on to love and service or to marry someone who holds me back from those things and so i think what paul is saying here is if you do marry make sure that you marry someone in that first category and not the second category so they might spur you on because we live in a world where the the plan of redemption is really really important now what does that mean about the uh divided hearts of the the married person i think paul is just saying that it is right for a married man or a married woman to be concerned about the affairs of this world if you're married thinking about how you're going to provide for your wife and your children or if you're a wife how you're going to provide with your husband for your children together that's really important for you to think about it's right for you to think about it and it's right for that to have implications on how much you're able to serve elsewhere now if you if you're married do not neglect your marriage because you think you're serving in church is more important than you being faithful and loving to your husband or your wife don't say that because that's not got any support in 1 corinthians 7 paul is realistic that's the case and so actually in a way how do i live with undivided devotion to the lord as a married person by actually maintaining and loving my wife and maintaining our marriage together okay so that is creation for and redemption uh i want you instead of asking me questions to talk about it together i've got two case studies it's easier to talk about mythical people isn't it so graham comes to see you people don't come and see you like this do they they can't see me like this but just imagine you're me or imagine that they've you know rung you up or something uh graham comes to see he decided a few years ago that he should be single for the gospel believing that was how 1 corinthians 7 applies to him recently though he's begun to have feelings for sarah sarah is single also in the same church they worked together on a few rotas he asked you to pray that he'd refocus on the gospel and put thoughts of marriage out of his mind what do you say to him how does 1 corinthians 7 answer him claire was married before she became a christian but her partner never wanted to come to church it's tense at home whenever the subject [42 : 56] comes up and she's thinking of leaving him what do you say what does 1 corinthians 7 say to her i'll chat with the person next to you about that and then i'll take your feedback and questions and then we'll finish in a few moments right i'm sorry to interrupt your conversations i i don't want us to go on too late because i know it's been a long day for people but um what would you what would you say to graham ask her out on a date nathan yes so the big unspoken question in the case study is what does sarah feel yes yes yes yes it can be marriage and gospel yes the big unspoken thing is uh how to suffer so he should find that out right you should ask her yeah yeah so that's that's the first that's the first step i think graham's assumption is that god's sovereign plan of redemption is critically hinged on his remaining single and so that that god bringing sarah across his path and then his kind of flourishing love for her is somehow an accident that god has allowed to happen yeah which doesn't seem to be very correct yes okay anybody else want to add anything that they might say to graham you said that we have to so graham and sarah all these things could be like is this new are these us together going to yes excellent yes thanks later yes so then and

then together they need to say are we are we going to serve the gospel well together as a couple yeah yeah yes so well so there might be all sorts of reasons in the lord's providence why he has brought sarah and graham together at that point but it is not just to hold him his plan of redemption back yeah great that's right i say lots of things that don't help conversations you can also isn't the make like the thing here obviously it's good to know what sarah wants yeah but isn't it also trying to be like graham why are you so like adamant that you need to be single yes that might have been like in that situation that might have been the commitment for you in that time yes yeah actually are you surrendering your life to the lord and he may be like that no anymore yes yeah yeah that's great thank you i don't think i could quite capture that for the thing but it was really helpful so yeah just again sort of saying about the lord's sovereignty and graham assuming that he knows what's best for the gospel really yeah yeah if graham was 18 would that change the counsel that you've given i would be yeah i mean how old was he when he made his single for the gospel commitment i suppose that would be quite young if that was the case i think it would change the advice yeah probably wouldn't it but should it there they go there's another case study coming right up yeah yeah so if he's 18 and not in a position to look after why yeah no that's a really helpful point isn't it because because basically verse 33 um would suggest that in getting married he is responsible for his wife and he needs to be concerned about how he's going to look after her and care for her yeah sorry yeah yeah yeah okay yes yeah okay so we're not gonna be able to answer all of those questions but i think the comments which is really helpful is that we might put a particular cultural spin on what it looks like to look after a husband or a wife which involves a certain level of income on a certain uh lifestyle and that that might not be right and actually that in a community of love and support we might be able to support that in other ways i think that's helpful okay what would we say to claire yeah yes so we have answered that and it is answered directly i think though we want to say that don't we with sympathy that acknowledges that actually there is almost nothing more difficult than being in a marriage that's hard singleness presents particular challenges that we're going to think about next week marriage in this situation brings a suffering which is unlike any other as well um and so actually we need to be realistic about that with claire and encourage her that god will give her the grace and the strength and the courage to live a life which pleases him yes it is a form of persecution yeah it's a it's accounting the cost of a following christ yeah yeah okay any other questions or comments from anybody else particularly if you've not had chance to say your question your burning question what about verse 14 yeah so actually that there is a benefit to her husband of her staying with him yeah thank you yeah verse 14 yes how the text is answering claire's claire's situation so it seems to be that if an unbelieving partner so if someone becomes a christian and they're married and their partner does not and the unmarried sorry not the unmarried and the the unconverted partner is willing to stay with them they are to stay together and so the christian is not to initiate divorce or leave in that setting but the the unbelieving partner might want to leave and in which case it says that you should let them go yeah yeah does that change yes yes so how does that work with children as well yeah so does that change if they do or don't have children i don't think the advice to claire changes but i think that what you can say to claire the the kind of hope that you can give her um which i think is is what we were saying here is that actually the hope is it is good for your husband for you to stay with him and it is good for your children as well so don't assume that just because you have an unbelieving husband your children will be spiritually damaged by that yeah they can hear about jesus and they can come to faith in him if you remain in that marriage yeah obviously that is assuming the marriage is not abusive and the husband is not abusing his wife and all those sorts of things but yeah i'm making that great right it is i am 10 minutes over my time i am going to pray and close there and then you can ask me questions at the end if you like to let's pray father in heaven we thank you so much for your word the bible thank you that it's so honest um it's so realistic about who we are it's honest about our sin and our struggles and it's truthful about this glorious plan of redemption in the lord jesus christ and so we thank you for him and we pray that whatever our situation that we are going into we'll find ourselves in you would help us to live with our eyes on jesus our hope in him and our courage from him bless us we pray in jesus name amen so so so so so!