

Today, I want to talk to you about “Having a divided interest.” Some of us divide our interest all the time, (between God and everything else), whereas God demands our **undivided** devotion.

For the last few weeks, we’ve been in Chapter 7 of 1st Corinthians. And it’s a section where Paul is answering questions that they’ve written to him, asking about. What a privilege that must’ve been, hey... – getting to ask the Apostle Paul, questions about living the Christian life. And we’re **also** privileged, because we get to hear the answers.

So far, it seems that most of the questions they asked, were about sex, marriage and family. And why wouldn’t they be? These are big issues of life. And this theme continues today.

Today, he addresses “those who are betrothed”. He’s talking to those who are **not** married, but they’re considering marriage. Technically, “Betrothal” wasn’t the exact equivalent, of our modern-day “engagement”. It was probably a stronger tie than being engaged today. But essentially, when we read what Paul says, it’s pretty clear that he’s talking to those who are not married, but they are considering marriage.

And what he says to them, probably goes (pretty much) against the culture of the Christian church of today...

*I don’t know if you’ve noticed or not, but the prevailing culture within the Christian church today, is “If you’re of marriageable age, and you’re not married, **why not???**”*

Some of us “married Christians”, are so content in our **own** marriage, and it’s been such a wonderful blessing to us, that we see it as our **duty** to marry everybody else off. *Oh, you poor person – you’re already in your 20’s and you’re not married yet – we’d better match you up... Hey???, Isn’t that the culture of the church???*

And yet, the Lord has called some to singleness, and He’s called some to be married.

Right from the time of Creation, YHWH God said, “**It is not good that a man should be alone**”, and so He created woman.

And so **most** people have an immense desire (a God-given craving), to **not be** alone. A man hungers for a wife. A woman hungers for a husband. And marriage, is a gift of God, for husband and wife, to be united for life. The two, become one flesh....

But God does **also** give the gift of **singleness**...

And to the married, **and** to the single, Paul’s advice is, “Remain as you are”.

We touched on V27 a few of weeks ago, when we talked about marriage, divorce and remarriage. V27 says: “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. And our English translations say “Are you free from a wife?” The **Greek** actually says, “Have you been ‘loosed’ from a wife?” “Have you been ‘untied’ from a wife?” (which seems to include those

from broken marriagesⁱ), **do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned...**

Alright, so if you're currently single, Paul's advice is, "It's best to **remain** single". But it's not a sin, if you do marry.

And the message is basically the same for the widows (and presumably also for the widowers). (For the kids, a widow is a lady, whose husband has died, and a widower, is a man whose wife has died.)

God has a very special, and a very deep love and concern, for widows. And so should we.

When a person has been married, particularly if it's been for a number of years, and their husband or wife dies, the one who's been left behind, can find their feelings, to be in a state of turmoil.

After the grieving period has finished, they might find themselves feeling a deep loneliness and having a longing for the intimacy that they've once experienced in marriage. And so they feel that they want to get married again, but they **also** feel that if they even consider remarriage, they're being disloyal to their husband (or wife) who's died...

After my Dad died, my mum found herself in a position where she was ready to get married again. And one of my uncles (Dad's brother), shared with me how he was having a tough time, accepting it – his brother's wife was going to be with

another man... But Paul's answer to these feelings of "disloyalty", is that the marriage bond does not continue into the next life. This is where the Sadducees had it wrong. They didn't believe in eternal life, and one of their arguments against eternal life, was "Who would you be married to in eternity..." But Jesus made it very clear (to the Sadducees), as Paul does here: If your husband or your wife dies, you're not married to that person any more. Marriage doesn't extend beyond the grave. And so you're not being disloyal by marrying another (provided you marry a Christian, that is).

But even so, Paul maintains that for those who are not married (including the widows), it's not a sin to marry, but they're still better off if they remain single...

Now, why would he say that? What's his reasoning for **why** "It is better to remain single"???

It's all about, "Living with an eternal perspective", and this is the point that he's making. It's about letting **nothing** (**Nothing**) distract us, from our primary purpose of pleasing God. A single person, doesn't have the same responsibilities that a married person does. Whenever a single person serves God, it will cost them personally. But for a married person to serve God, will cost both the husband and the wife. In a family, it costs the whole family...

He says:

³² I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the

Lord, how to please the Lord.³³ But the **married** man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife,³⁴ and his interests are divided. **And** the unmarried or betrothed **woman** is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. **But the married** woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

You see, living with an eternal perspective, is about always putting God first. If God, is truly my god, my primary purpose, is to be undivided in my devotion to God – to be undivided in serving God, and in pleasing God...

And when a man and a woman get married, their marriage can either be a marriage with an eternal perspective, or a marriage with a worldly perspective.

- Either the married couple together, begin a life of service to God, and their marriage is all about pleasing God (that's marriage from an eternal perspective);
- Whereas marriage from a worldly perspective, is where the marriage (or the family [for that matter]) becomes something that distracts them from their ministry – where it becomes something that distracts them from a life **purposed** to please God...

Their primary focus shifts, to the marriage itself, or the family itself, rather than God.

To please God, requires this eternal perspective.

This life is short. Paul says:

From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, (does that mean we can go out for a few drinks with the boys every night, because the wife doesn't matter? Of course not.)³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

What he's saying, is **everything** in this life, is worldly and it's temporary.

- Everything you have, is temporary.
- Everything you own
- Everything you buy
- Every business deal you make
- Every development you make
- Even the feelings and the emotions that you experience, are temporary...

And you mightn't have too much trouble agreeing with that, but he's also telling us, that our relationships (even our family relationships), are temporary...

- There is something far greater
- There's something eternal...

Our relationship with God....

If I'm single, if I get married, will my marriage distract me from what is pleasing to God? Or will my wife and I together, have an undivided devotion, to pleasing God???

But it's also equally valid to ask (if I'm single), "Am I living in singleness, with an undivided devotion of pleasing God?" Or in my singleness, am I getting distracted by the world?

Nothing should be allowed to distract us, from our primary purpose of pleasing God.

If God is God, God must **always** be first... This is part of the cost of being a disciple of Jesus.

The "Family First" political party, have now merged into the "Australian Conservatives". But in 2001, some Christians began this political party and they named it, "Family First". It's a name that they chose, so that it would be appealing to a broader electoral base, than what it would, if it was a distinctly Christian name... Imagine if they had called it "God first"... How many people would've voted for that?

But you know what? A lot of people are under the false impression that "Family first", always equates to "God first".

And so, what I'm about to say, might offend some people...

If I live with the mantra, "family first" – If I live with the principal that I'm always going to put my family as No.1, I'm not fit to be a disciple of Jesus...ⁱⁱ

Jesus said: **Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."ⁱⁱⁱ**

.....

- I love my wife dearly. But if my love for my wife exceeds my love for The Lord, then I'm not worthy of being a disciple of Jesus.
- I love my children dearly. But if my love for my children exceeds my love for God, then I'm not worthy of being a disciple of Jesus.
- If my wife or my children, become the ones I serve and live for, I've embraced a **worldly** perspective of "family", rather than an eternal perspective.
- I love my parents. And the Scriptures command us to honour our parents. But if I give my parents more honour than I give to God, then I'm not worthy to be a disciple of Jesus.

A lady who was married to a man who was not a Christian, said to me once, "If my husband doesn't get to go to heaven, I don't want to be there either." ...

I was stunned... She would rather go to Hell and be with the one whom she loved, then to be with God...

And that was very ‘telling’, about what place God had in her life... Our desire for eternity shouldn’t be about going to a nice place. Our desire for eternity, is about being with the one who we love, more than any other. It is to be with The Lord in His glory... It’s all about God – it’s not about us...

Some people try and justify their idolatry of family by making the claim “I’m serving God **by** giving my best for my family...” To an extent, that can almost, sort of be true(ish), but it’s got it all the wrong way around... It puts family as No.1, and then packs God in around it...

Example of packing for holidays (pushbike in first), otherwise it won’t fit / or it only partially fits.

And it’s like that, trying to pack God in around our family. We have to start with God.

It’s only when we have an eternal perspective, and we put **God** first, and then we bring our family life into this eternal perspective (of God being No.1 in everything that we as a family do).

That’s when it stops being about:

- “I don’t have time to serve;
- I don’t have time for ministry;
- I can’t afford to give;
- I’m not able to teach Sunday School;

- We can't have the homeless in our home, ,, because we've got so much else going on (you see) – our responsibilities are so much greater... My first responsibility is to my family; my next responsibility is to my work.... I can't do anything else for you now God. In fact, **this is** what I'm doing for you...

It's a total shift, to becoming: "We as a family, recognise that **You**, God are No.1, and as a family, we're willing, to give up whatever it takes, to serve You, how You would have us serve. We'll give ourselves away God, because we love You, more than anything else in this world."

I've found (over the years) that to truly serve God, is not only something that costs me. It costs my whole family... And that's not only because I'm a pastor of a church – that's the normal Christian life... A Christian family doesn't exist to serve itself – a Christian family exists to serve God , and it exists to love others, and to serve others, together, as a family.

Robyn and I have just entered into a new stage of life... Our children are grown. Our responsibility for them has ended, and it's now up to them. It's up to them:

- to put God as No.1 in their singleness.
- To put God as No.1 in their marriages.
- To put God as No.1 in their family...

And if you're old enough to understand this message, the ball is in your court now...

Putting God as No.1 in **your** life, isn't your parent's responsibility any more. If you're old enough to understand this, it's up to you. Will you have an undivided devotion to the Lord?

Living with an eternal perspective, is living to please God, in all that we do... Always putting Him No.1; loving God, more than we love **anyone** or **anything** on this whole earth.

Jesus is truly Lord, when He comes first – when we are unreservedly undivided in our loyalty....

Let's Pray.

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ⁱ 27. Paul spells it out. The man who has *married* (the Greek means 'is bound to a wife') should not seek to loose the tie. The man who 'has been loosed' (which may mean divorced, that the spouse has died, or that he has never married) should not seek a wife. Both verbs are in the perfect tense and indicate settled states.

Morris, L., 1985. *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

ⁱⁱ Luke 14:25–33 (ESV)

The Cost of Discipleship

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

ⁱⁱⁱ Example of ISIS (Islamic State) "Deny Jesus or we will execute your family".

iv In V39

When Paul said **A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.** He wasn't addressing the topic of divorce. He's already done that (back in Vs10 & 11, where he laid down the principal that marriage should **not** be broken, and then in Vs12-16, he gave an exception (except in the cases of desertion)). (In that case, divorce is permitted, and the divorcee is free).

Jesus did the same thing. Jesus has laid down the principal, that although divorce is possible, we shouldn't divorce. But Jesus also gives an exception – except for in the case of adultery...

So, that's what Jesus and Paul have both said, when they were specifically talking about divorce.

So, why would V39 say something different???

The thing is, here in V39, he's not addressing those who are victims of a broken marriage – he's not even talking about divorce. He's talking to women whose husbands have died. He's giving them a word of grace and freedom – “Your husband has died, and you have no reason to feel disloyal to your past husband. You're free to marry again. You don't have to live the rest of your life in loneliness; You are able, to once again, experience the intimacy that comes from knowing a husband.”

He wrote this to give freedom to the widow...

When he's not even addressing divorce, why would we take, what was written to give freedom to a widow, and use it to negate what he has specifically said about divorce? To take something which God gave for freedom, and to turn it into a legality, is what the Pharisees used to do, and that's why Jesus was so often at odds with the Pharisees. (e.g. Sabbath)

Citizen of Australia. Bound by its laws until I die. But not if I renounce citizenship.